

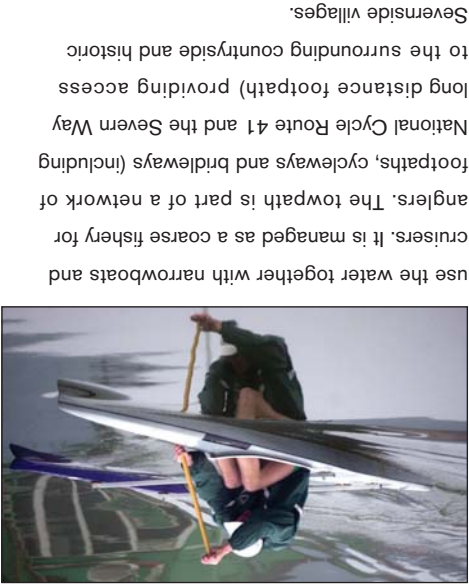


Rowers, canoeists and model boat enthusiasts all from a commercial to a recreational waterway.

can still watch the river pilots guide huge ships into the dock to load and unload with scrap metal, fish-meal, grain, granite blocks, cement and fertilizer.

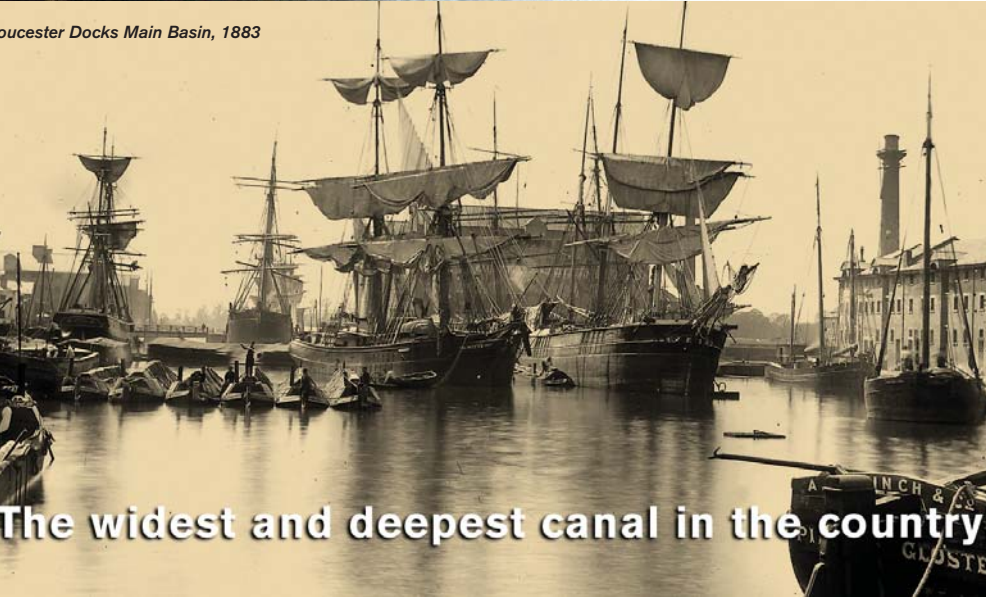
In complete contrast, at Sharpness picnic site you can still watch the river pilots guide huge ships into the dock to load and unload with scrap metal, fish-meal, grain, granite blocks, cement and fertilizer.

After many years of decline Gloucester Docks are being revitalised and now bustle with office workers, shoppers and tourists visiting The National Waterways Museum.



The National Waterways Museum.

The widest and deepest canal in the country!

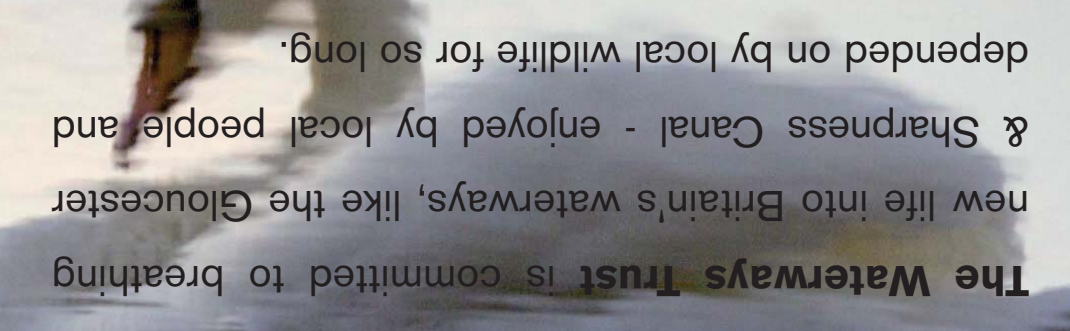
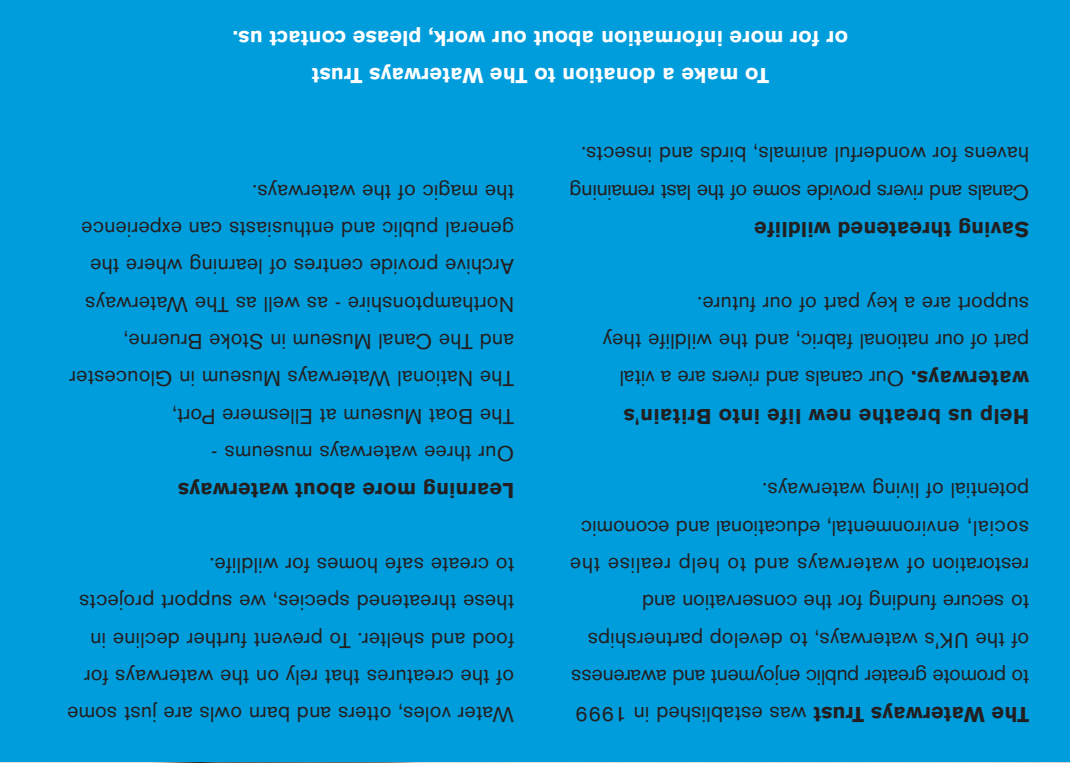
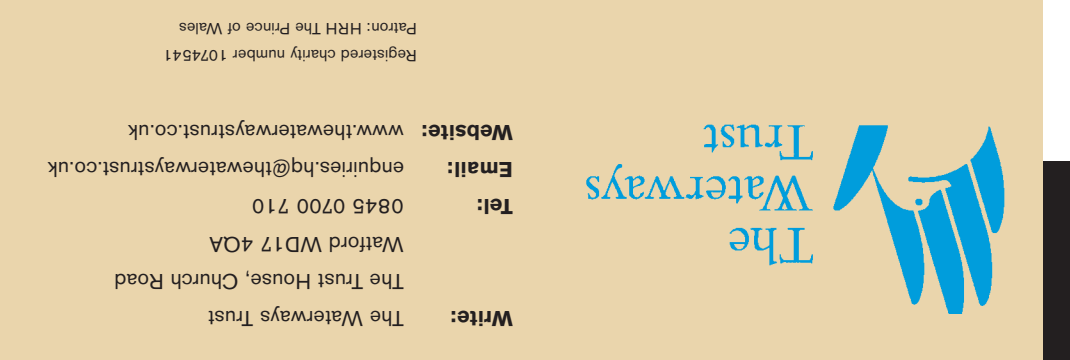
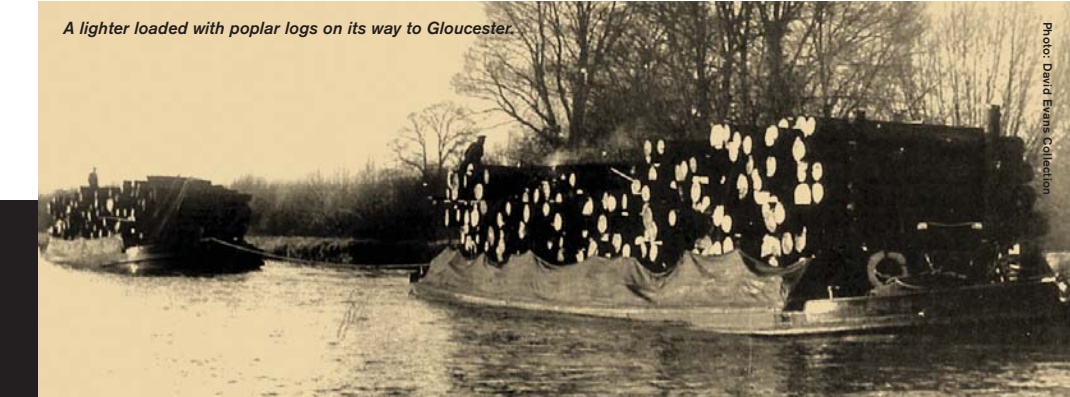
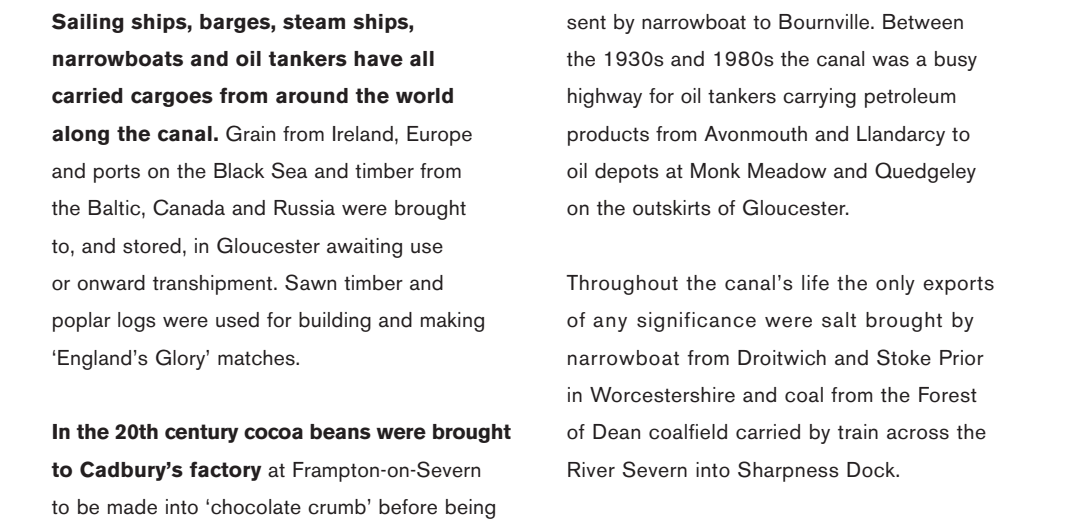
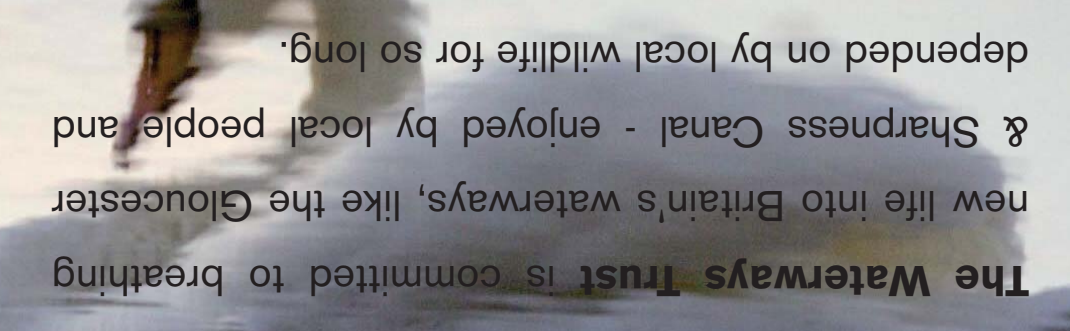
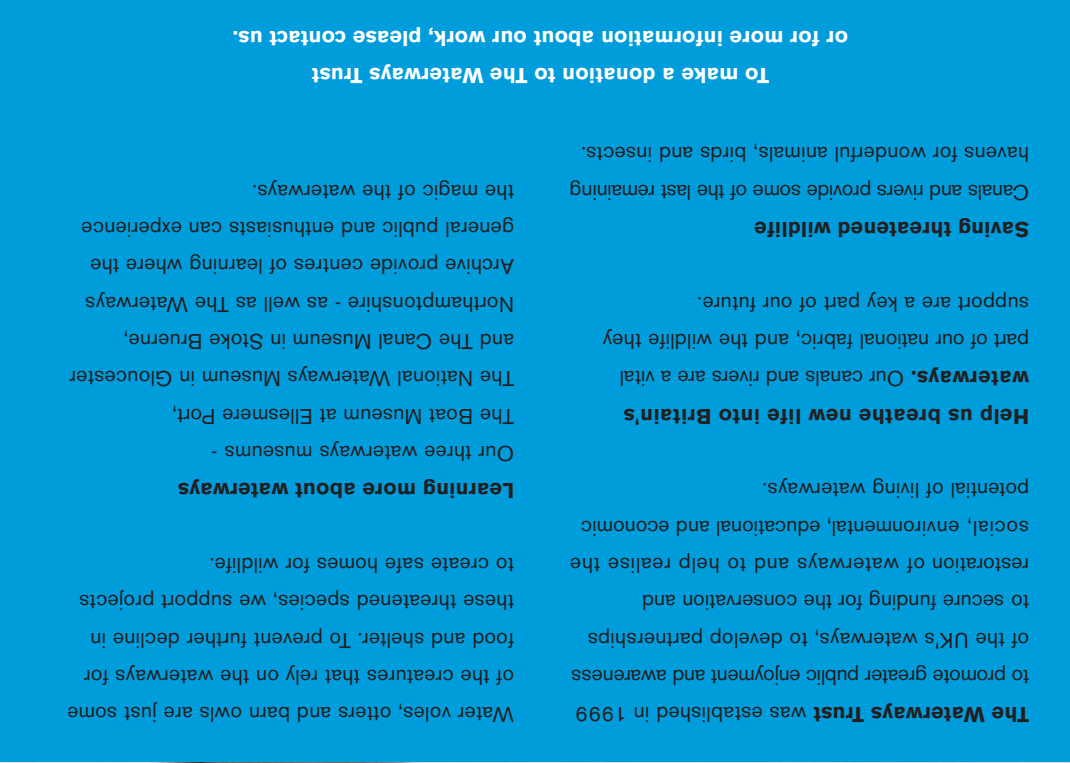
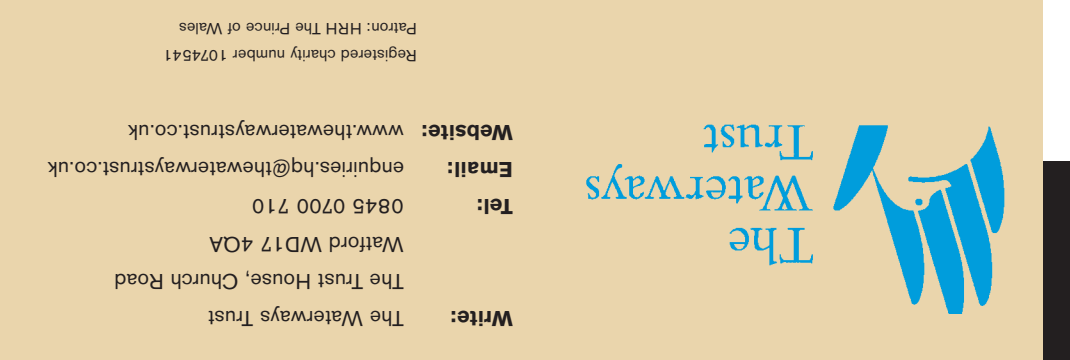
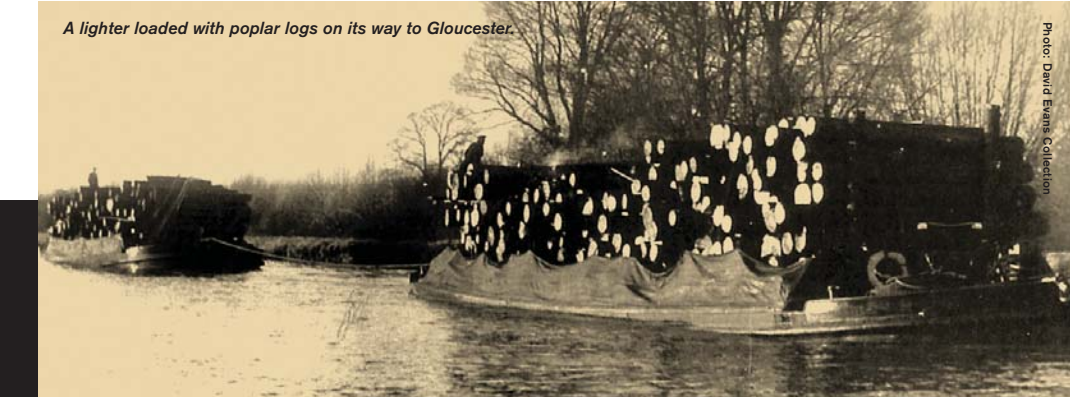
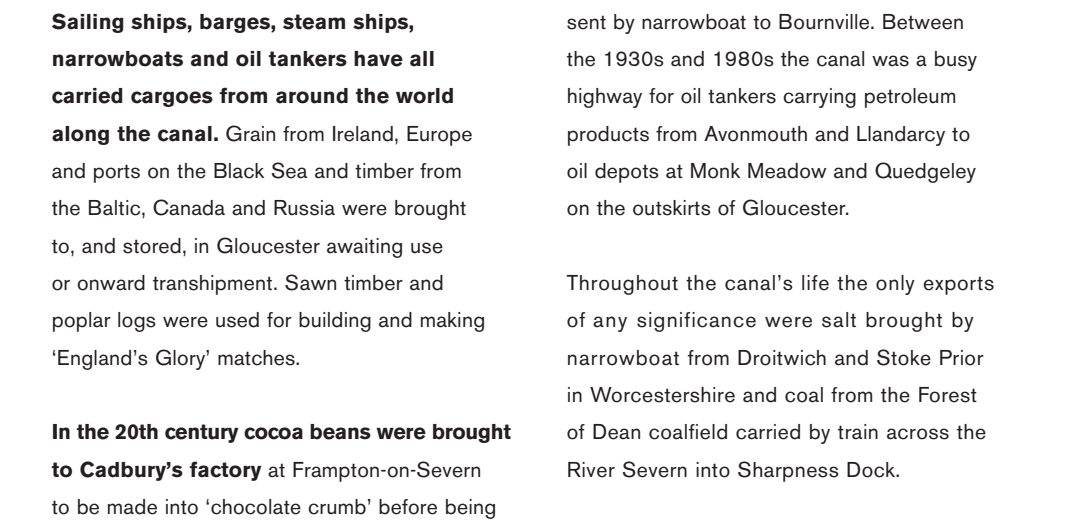
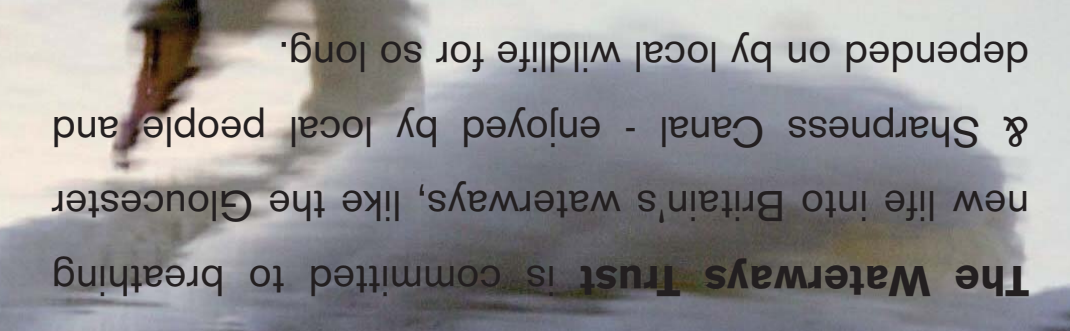
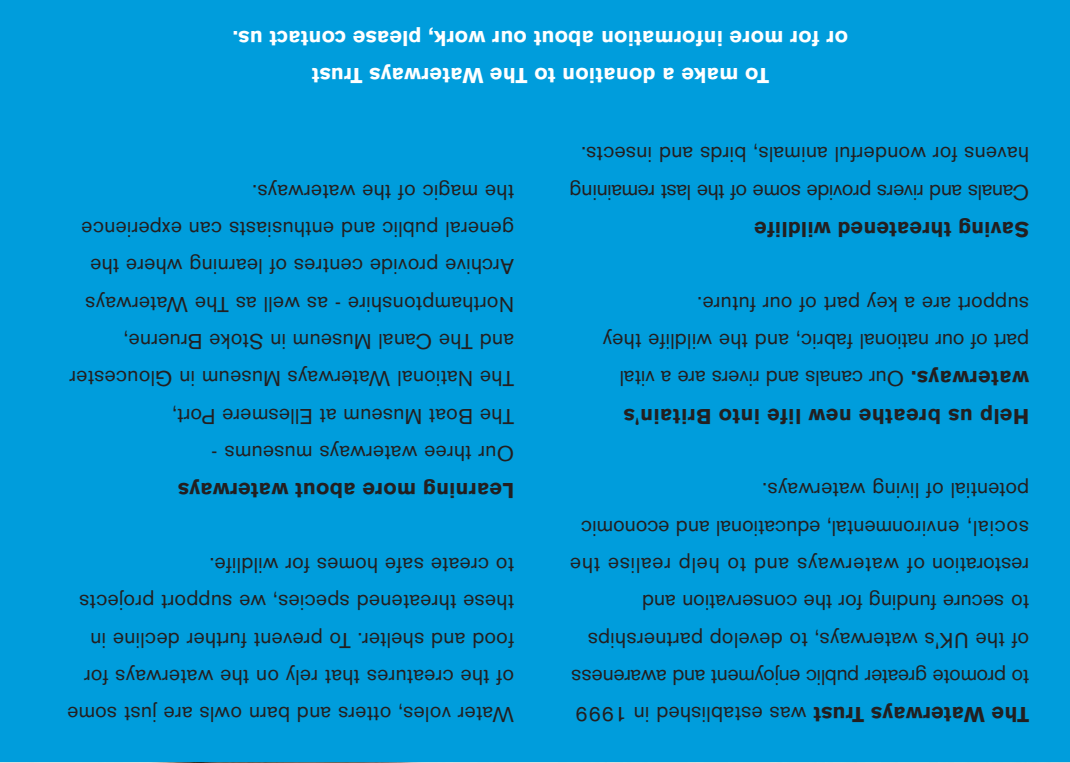
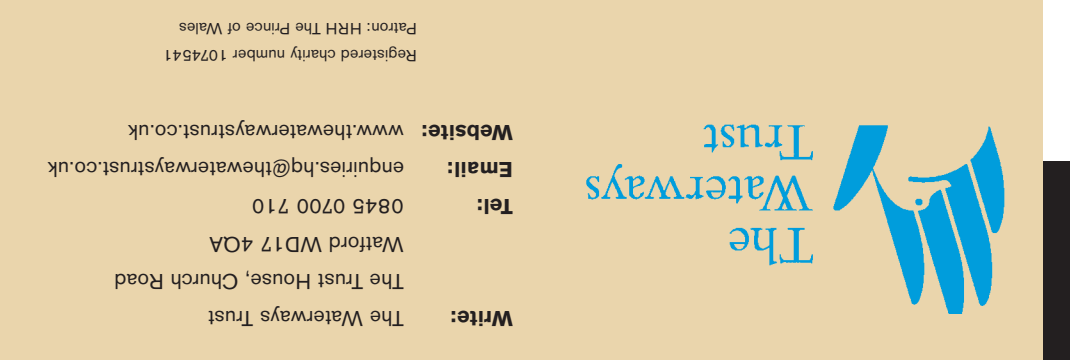
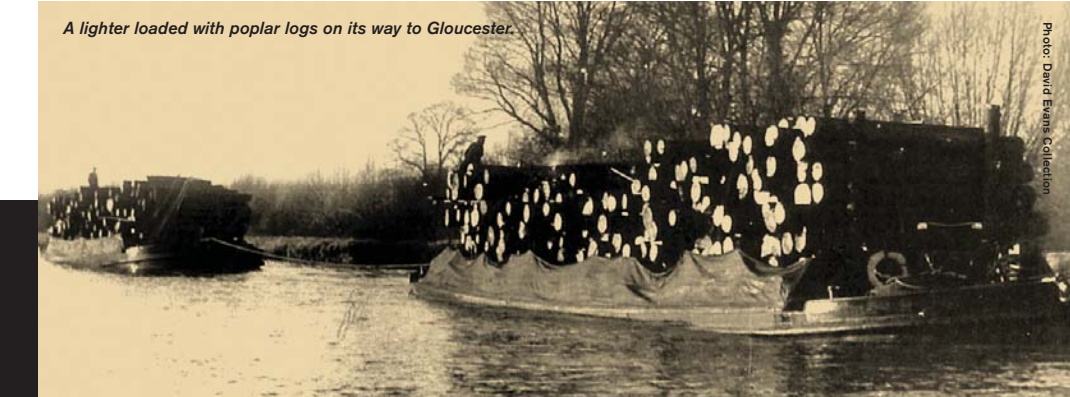
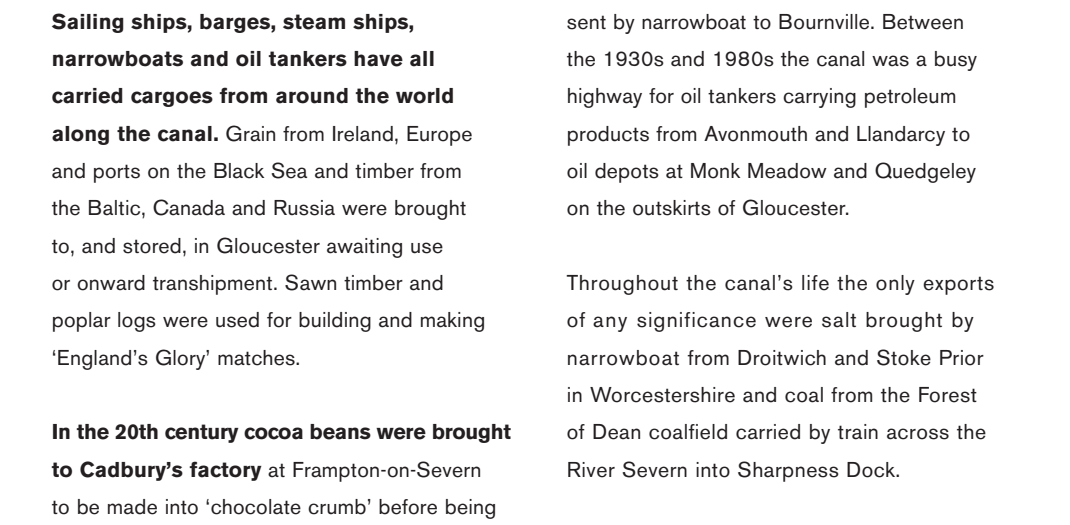
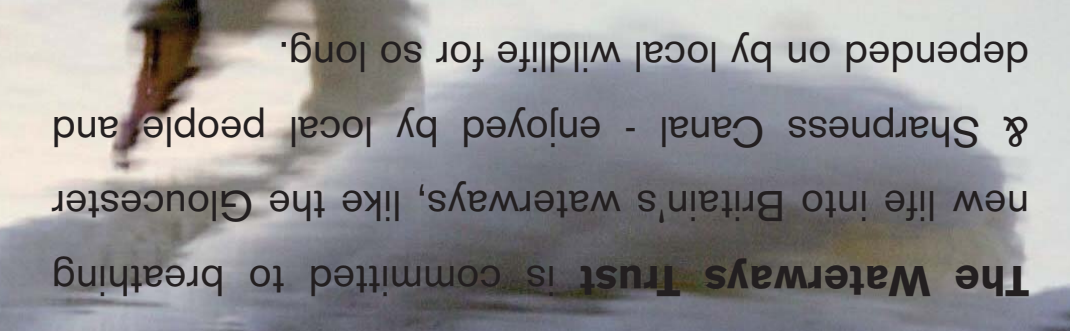
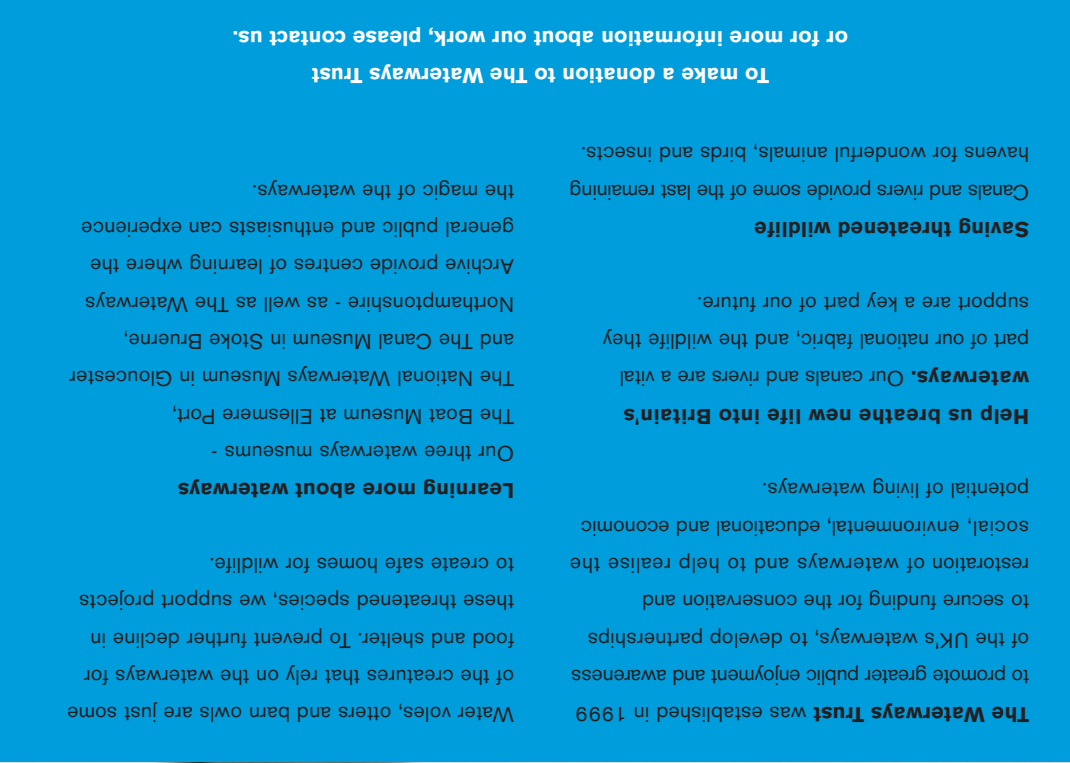
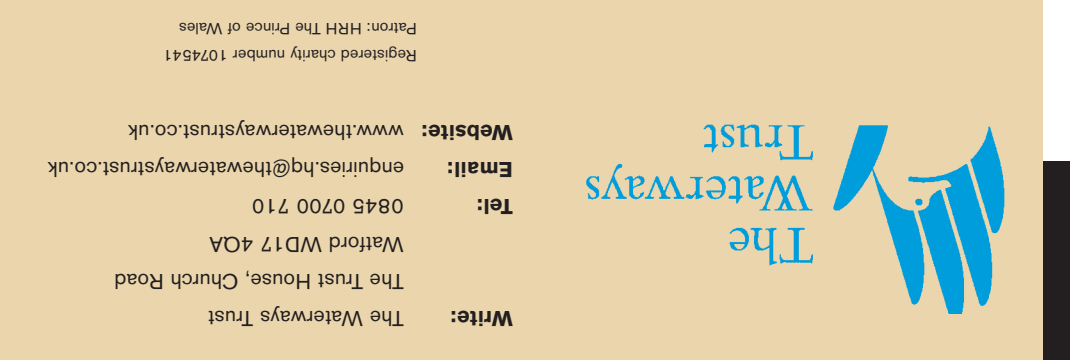
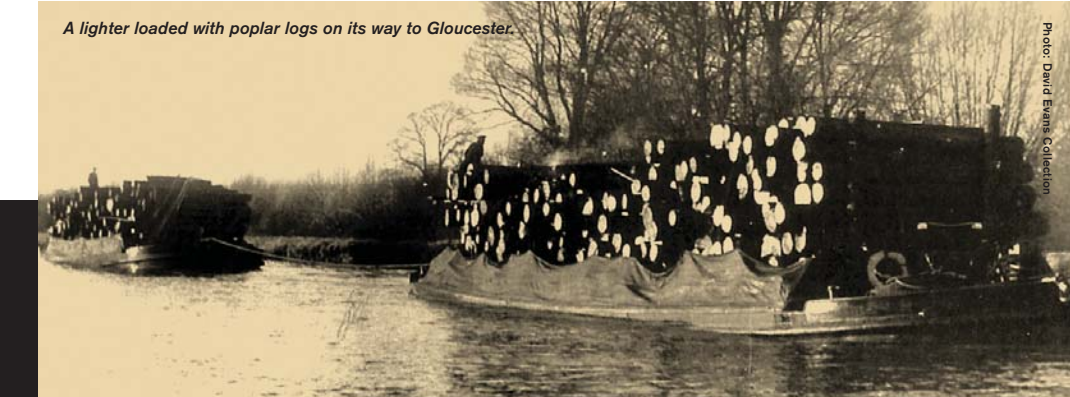
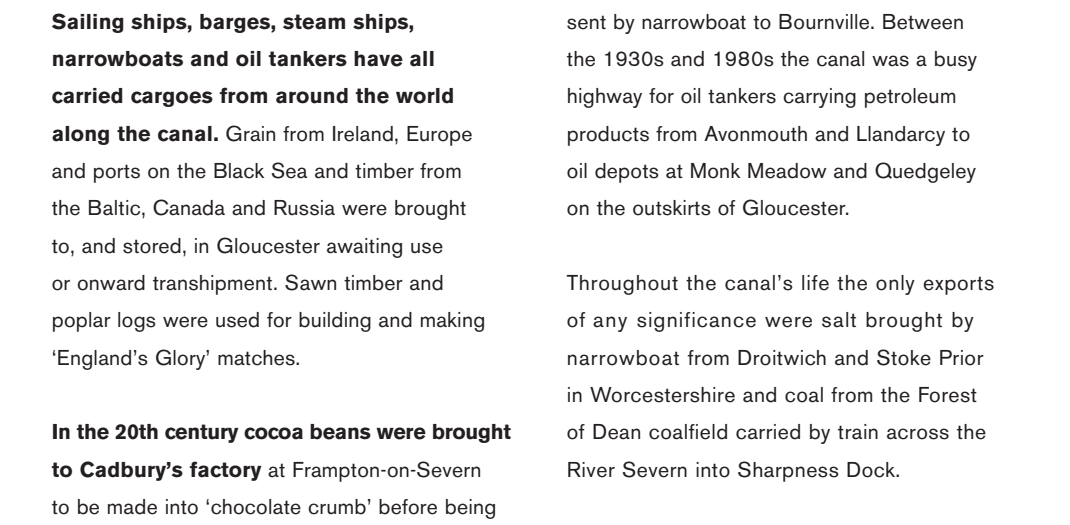
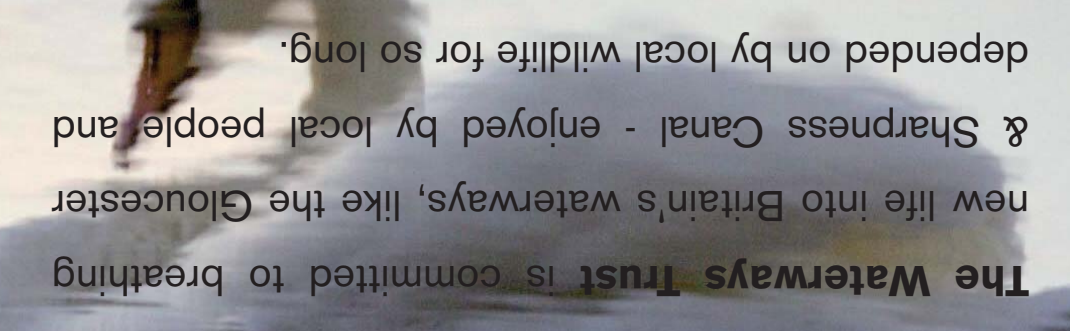
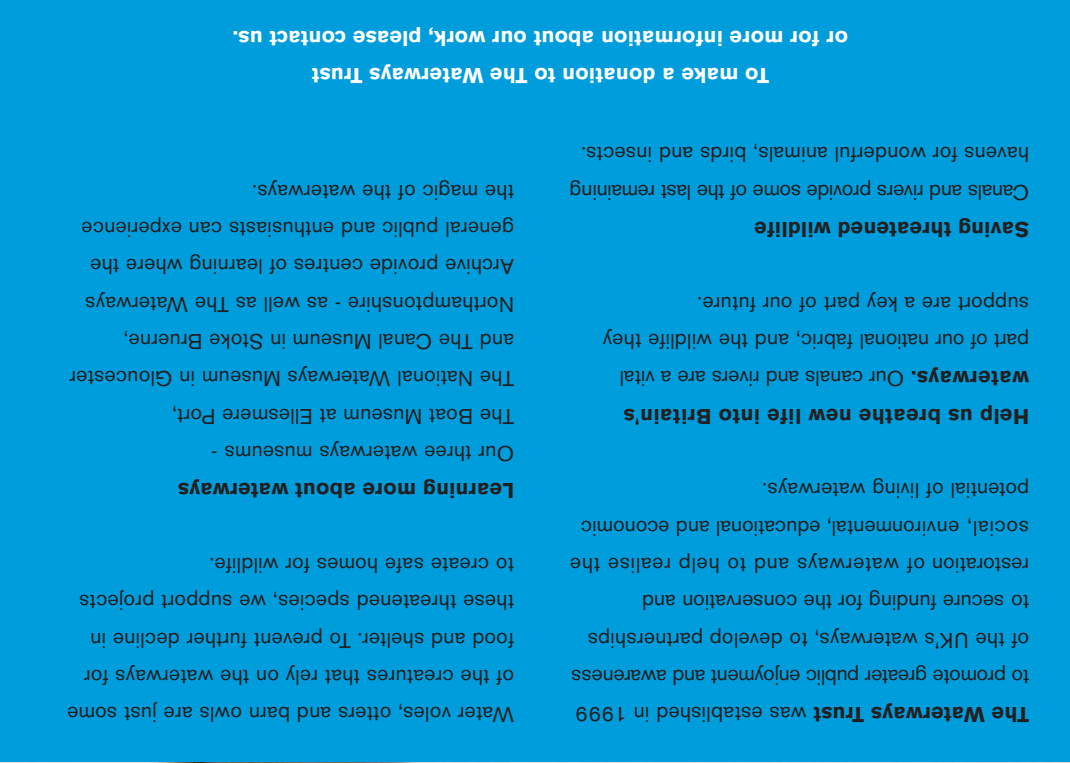
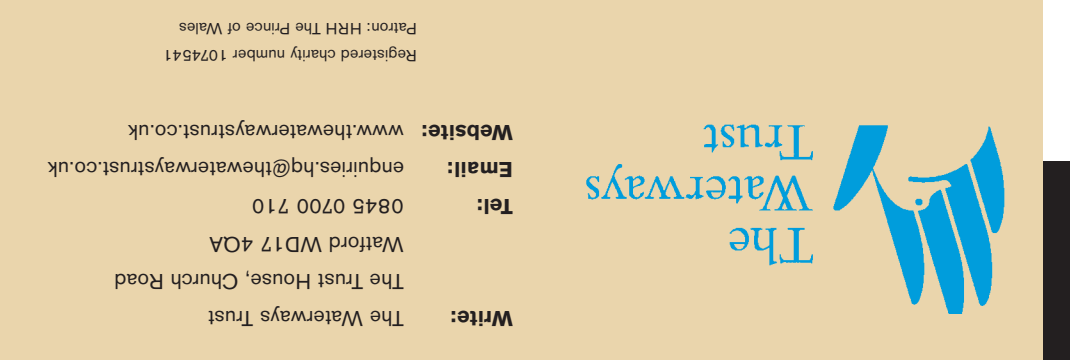
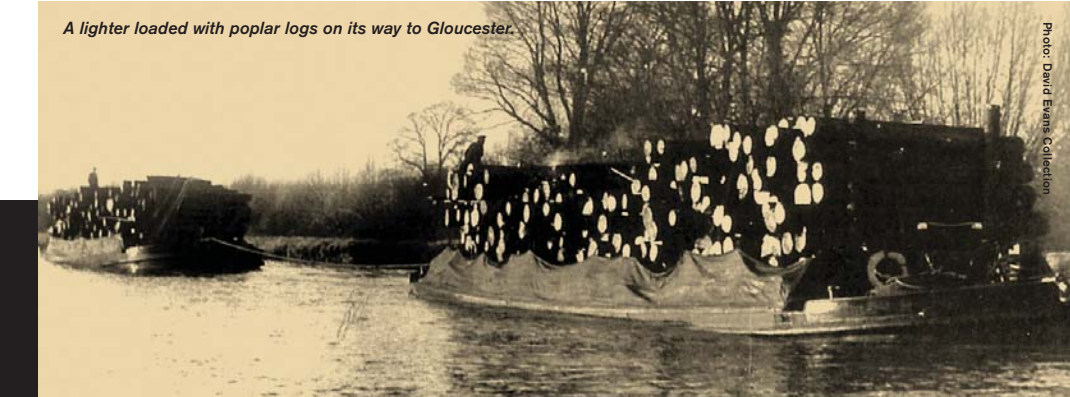
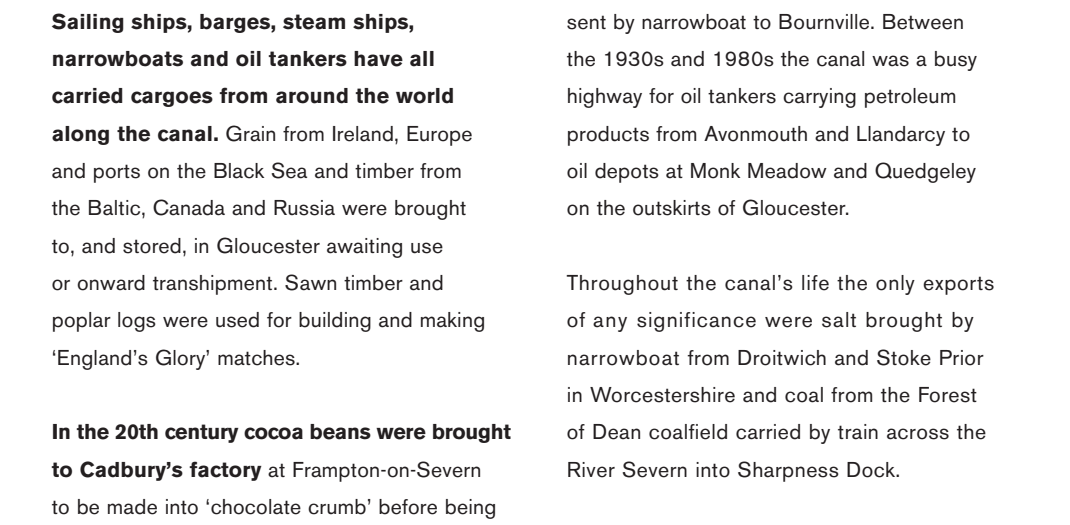
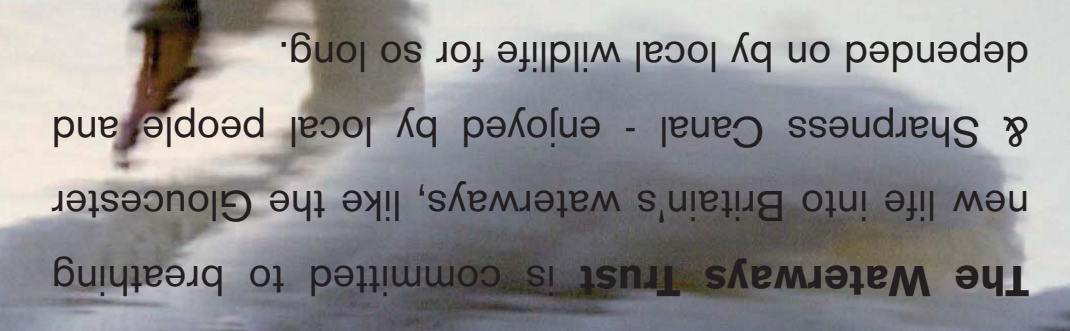
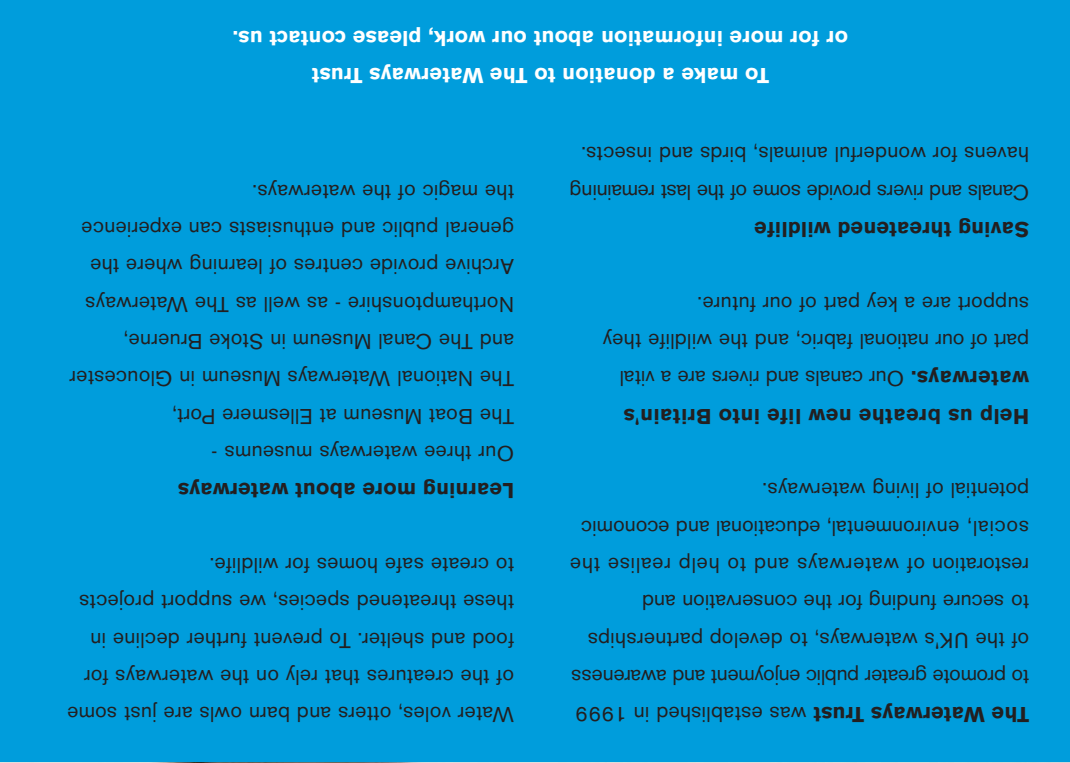
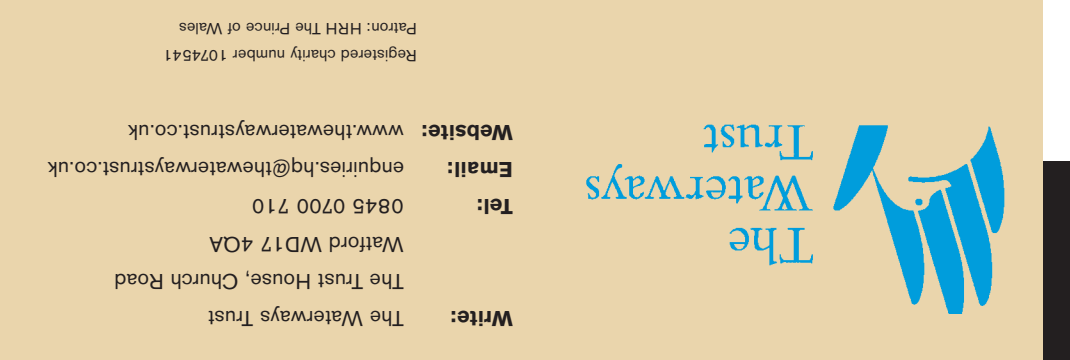
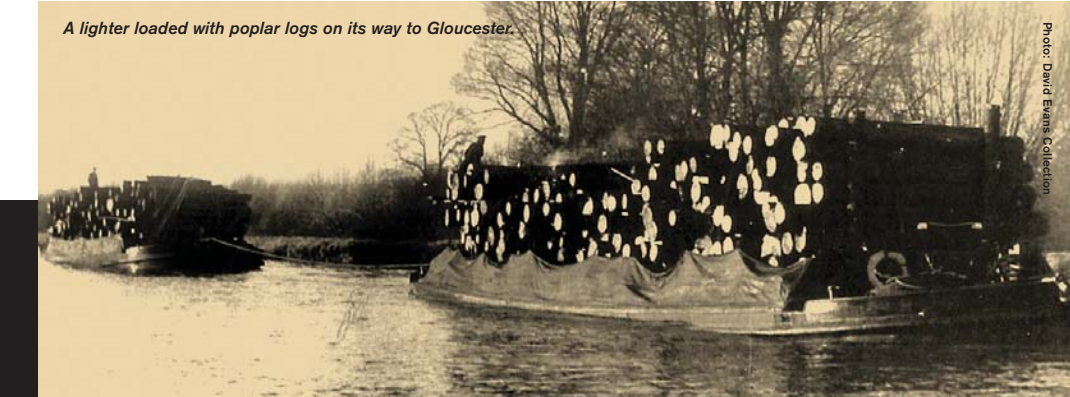
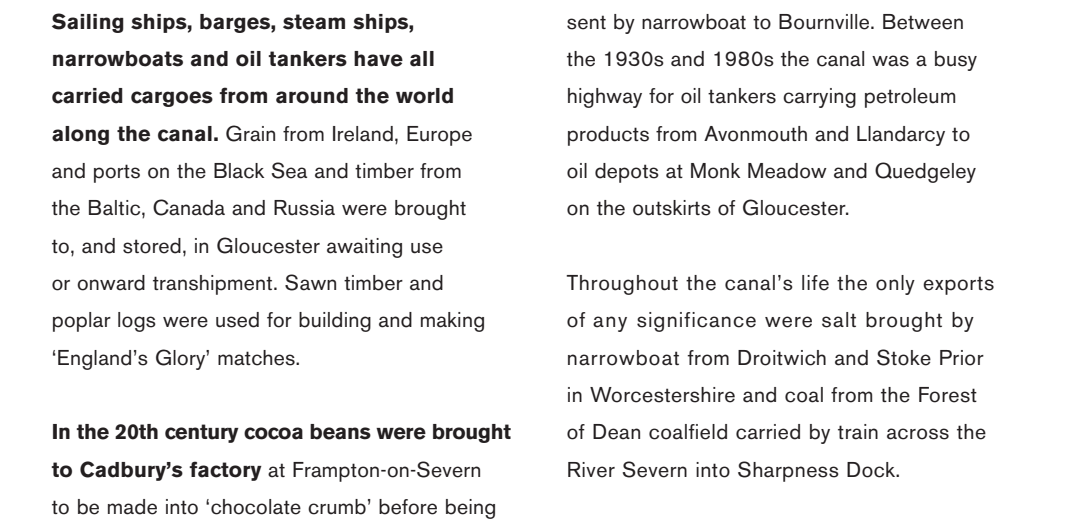
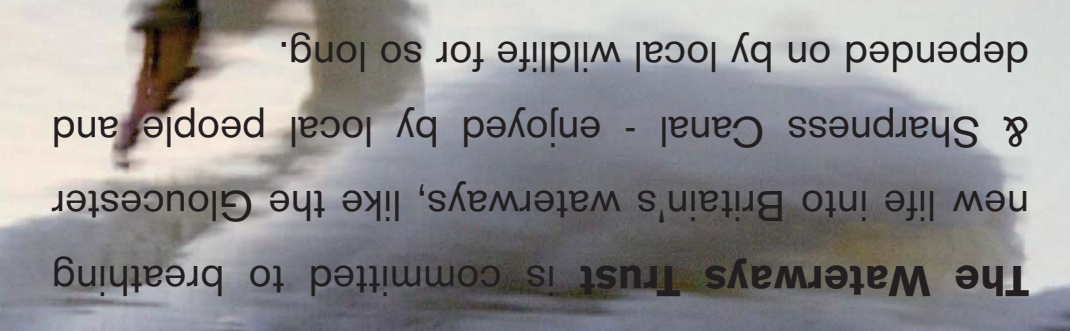
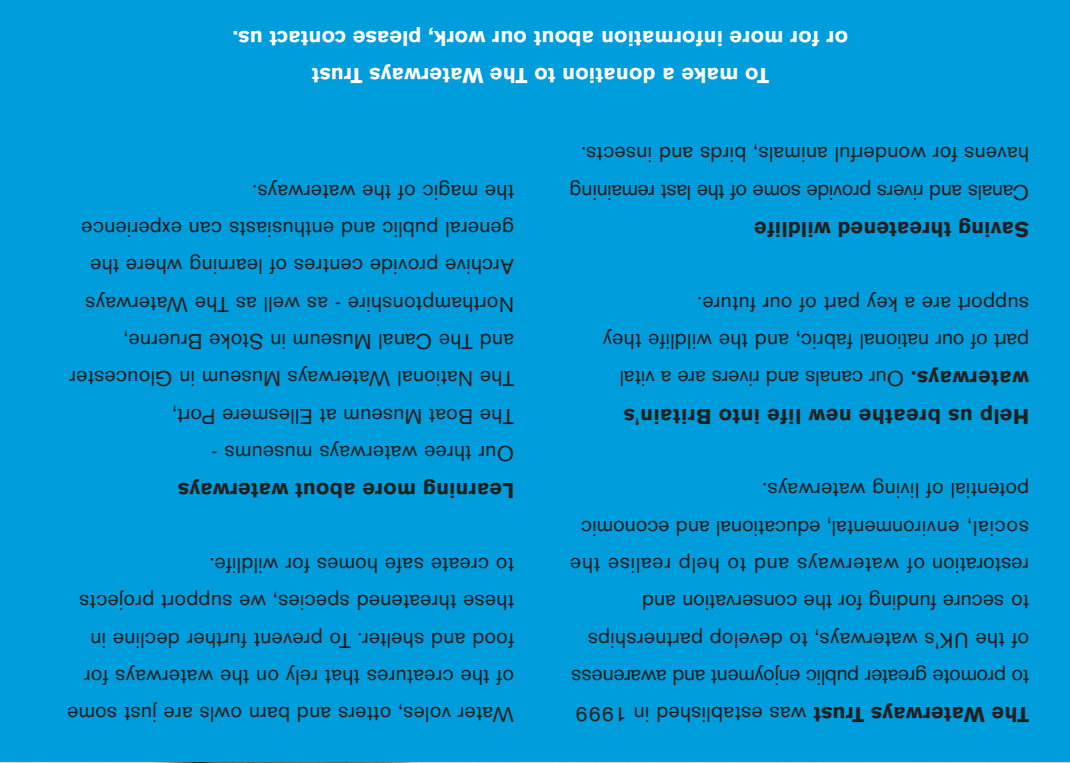
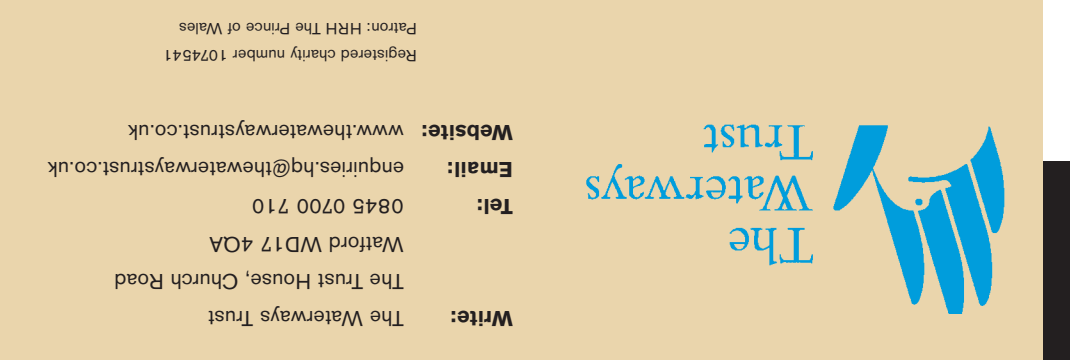
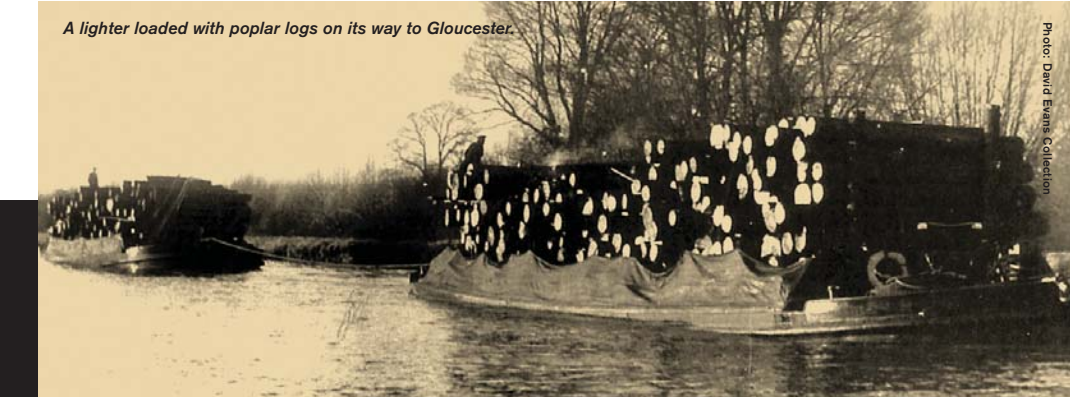
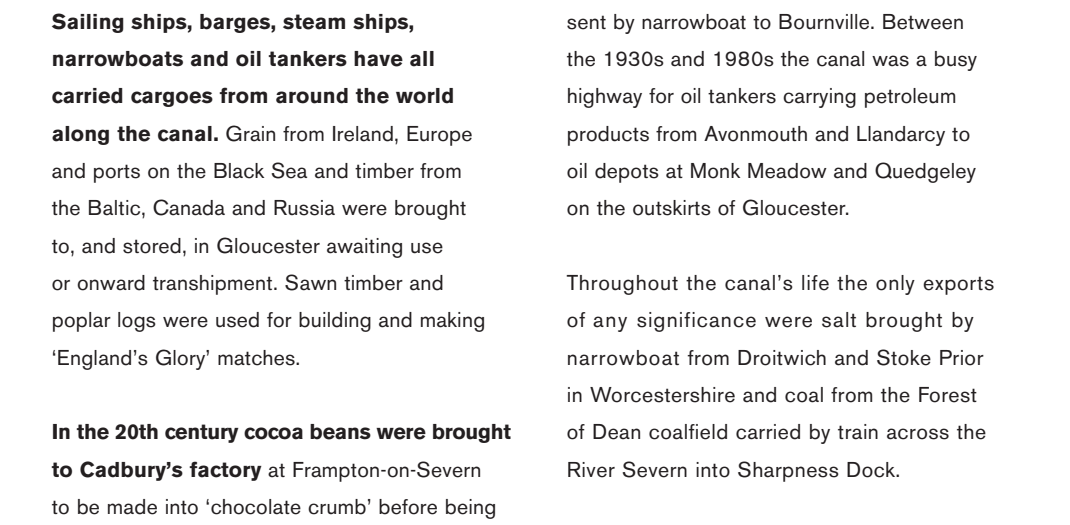
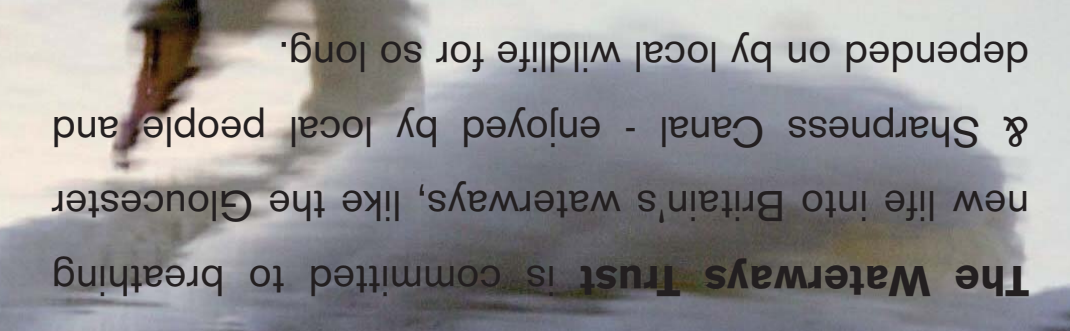
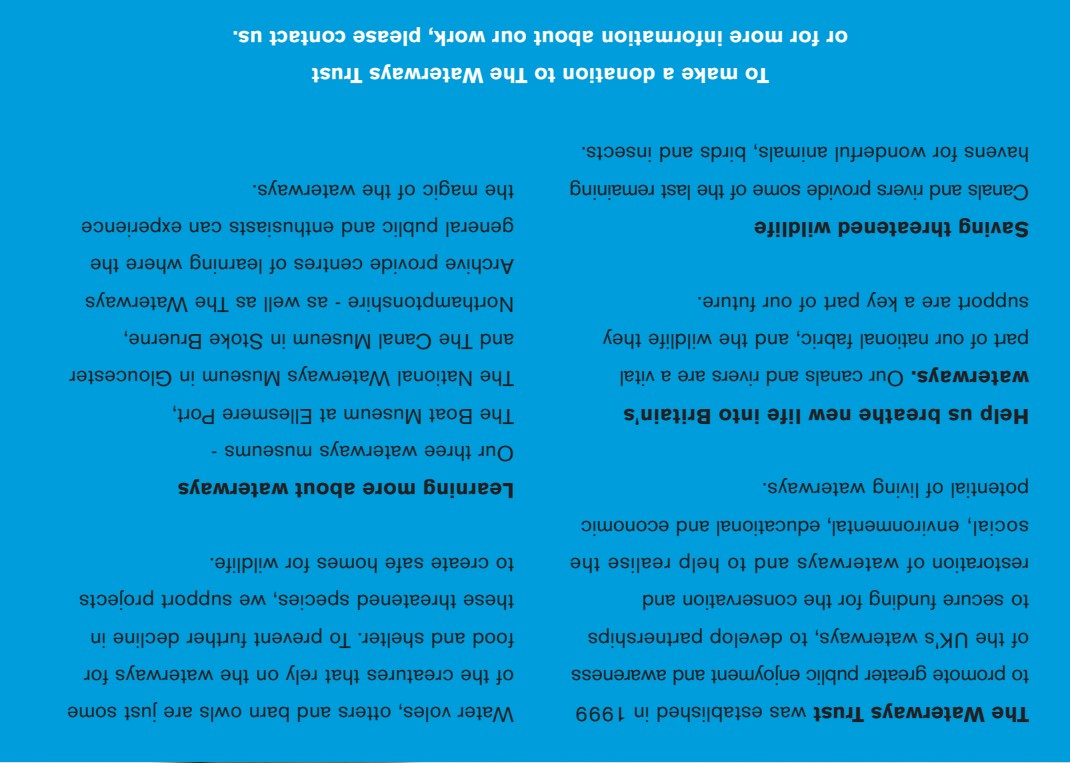
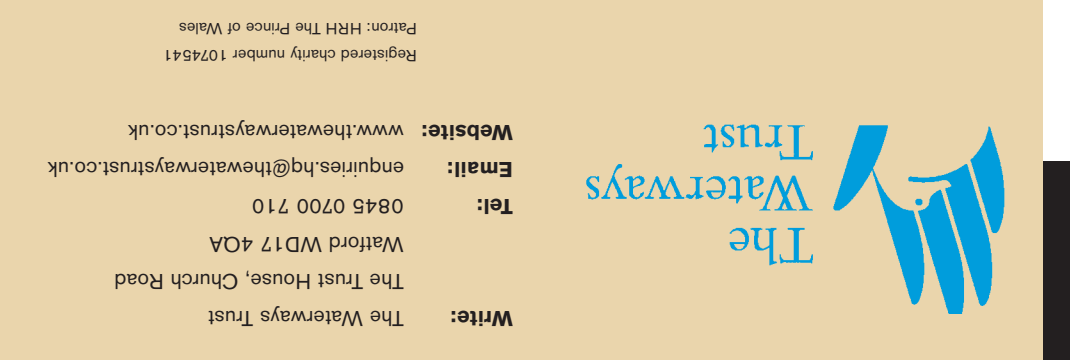
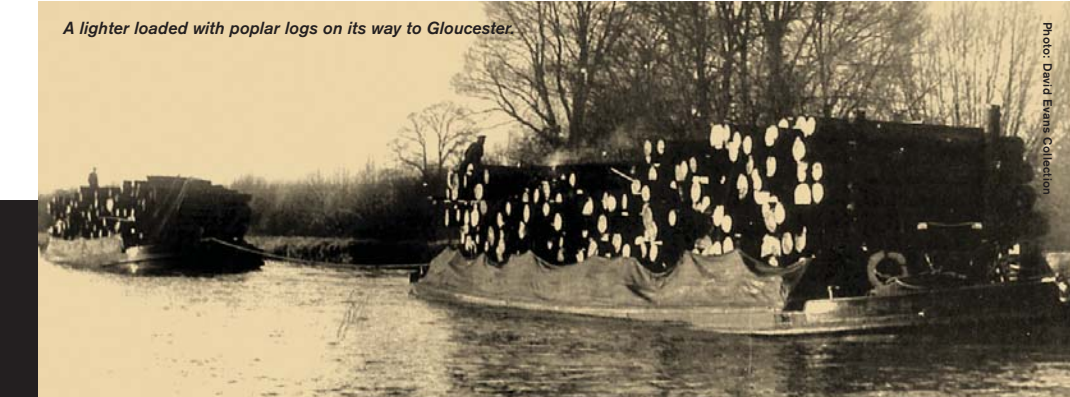
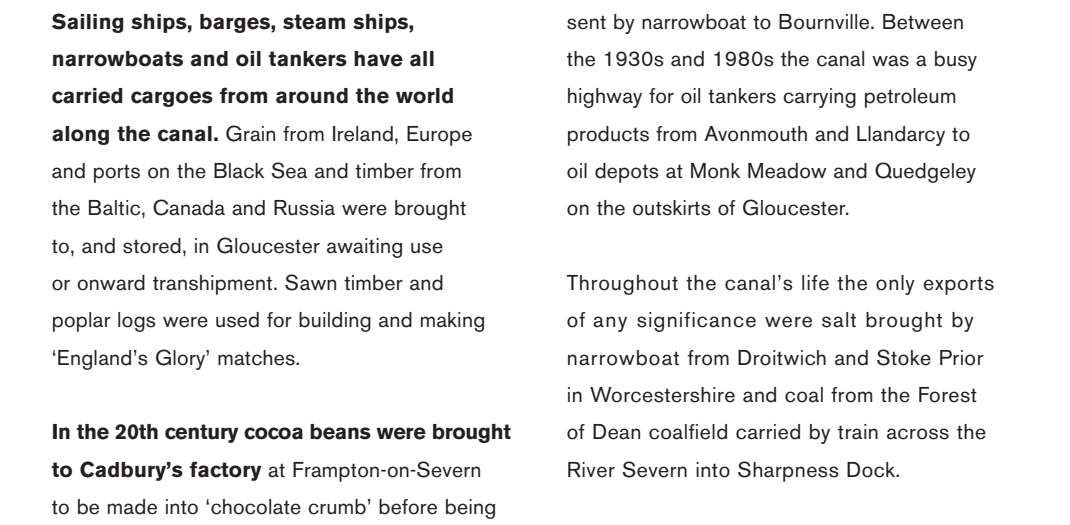
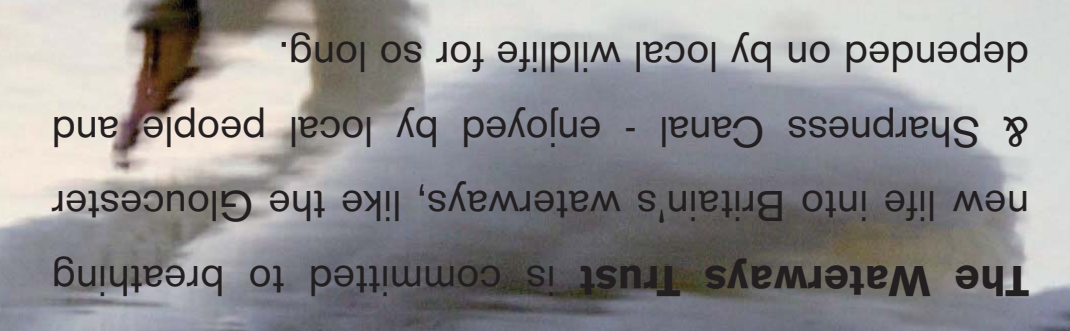
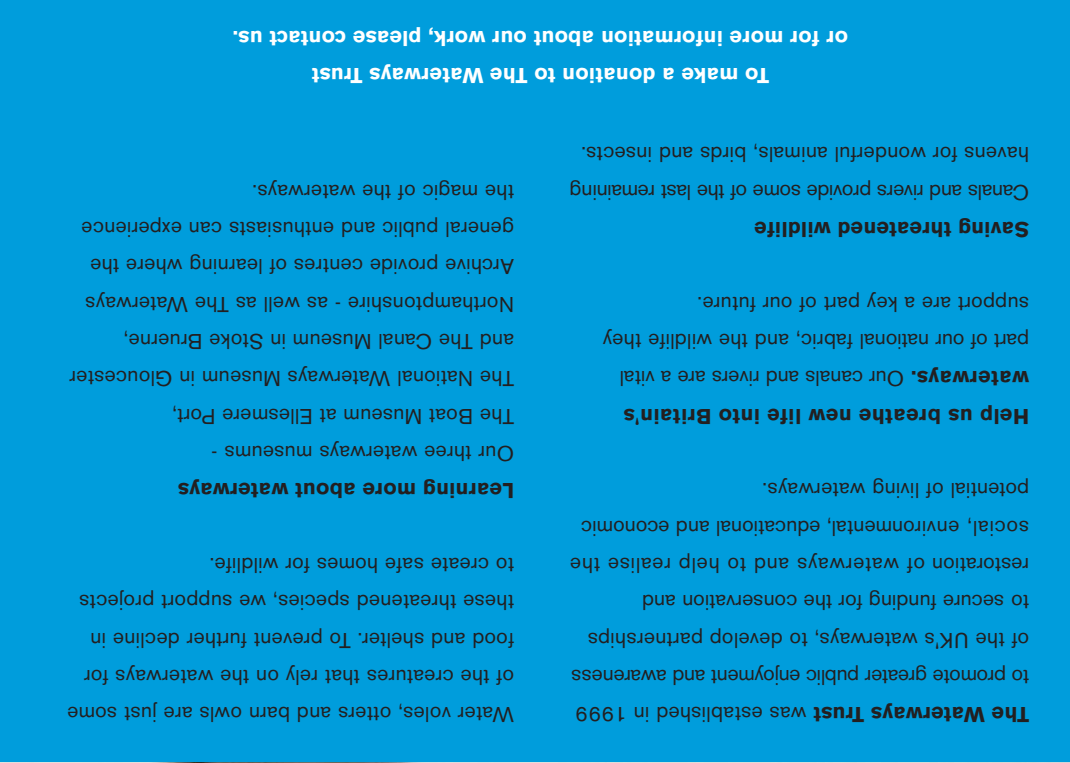
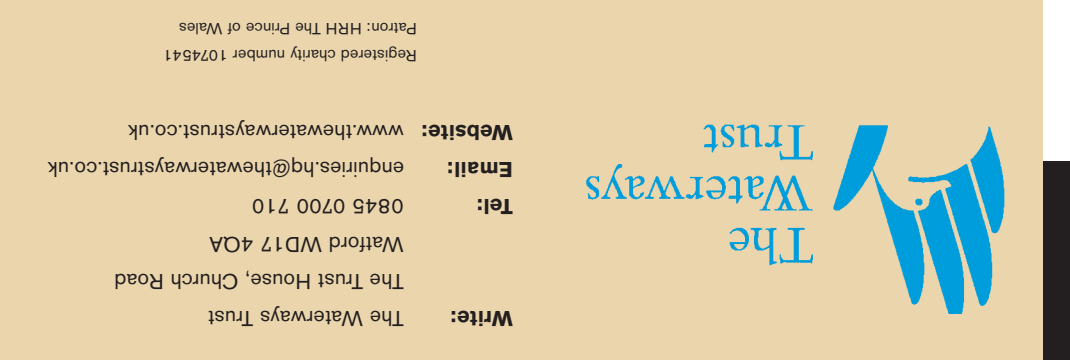
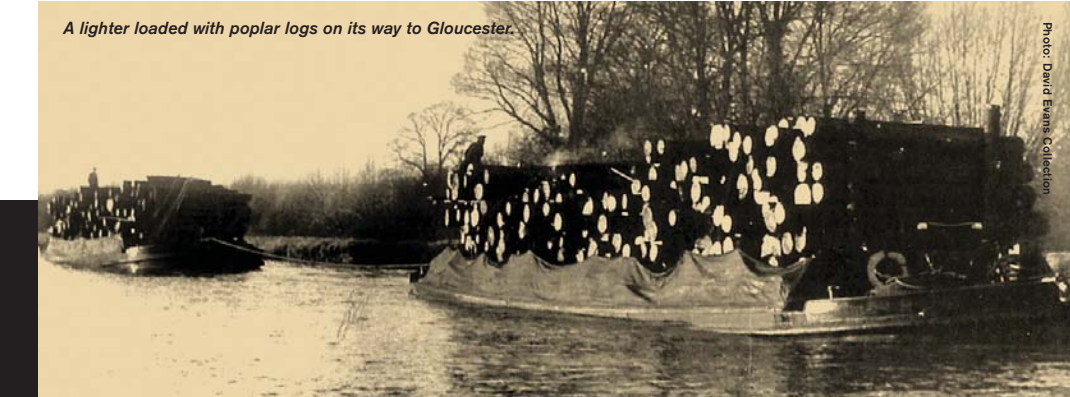
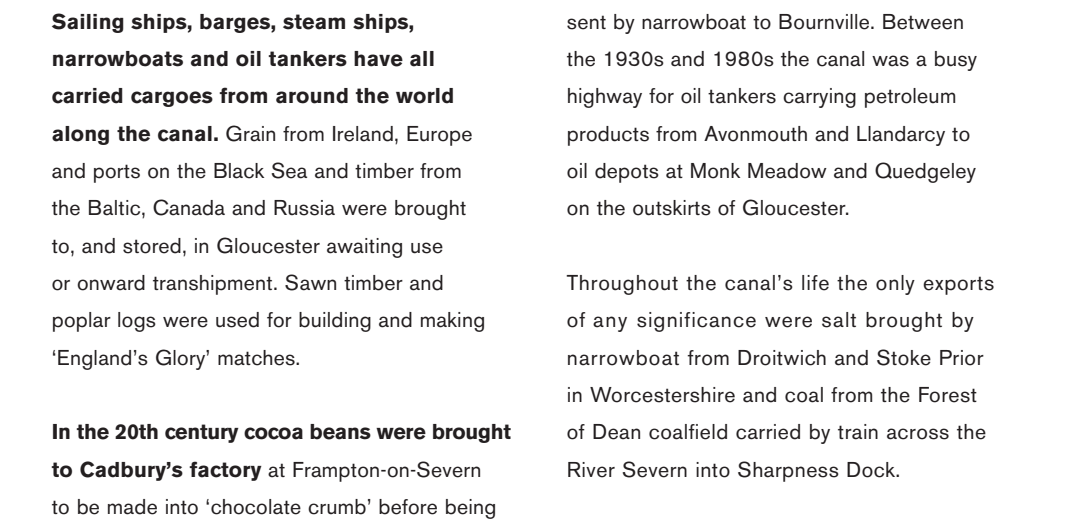
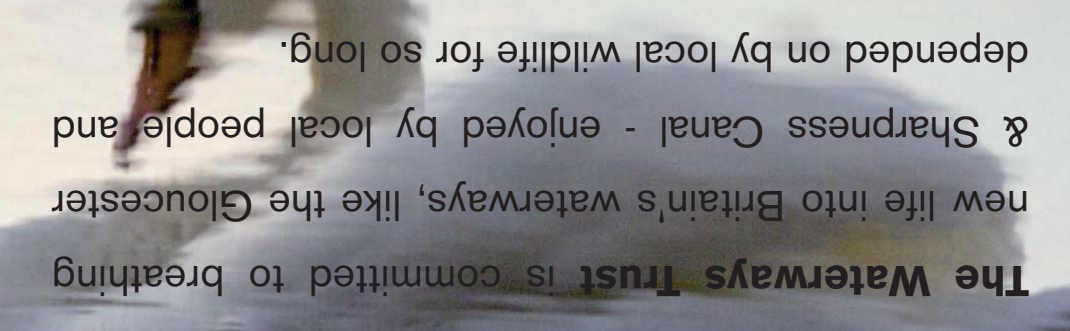
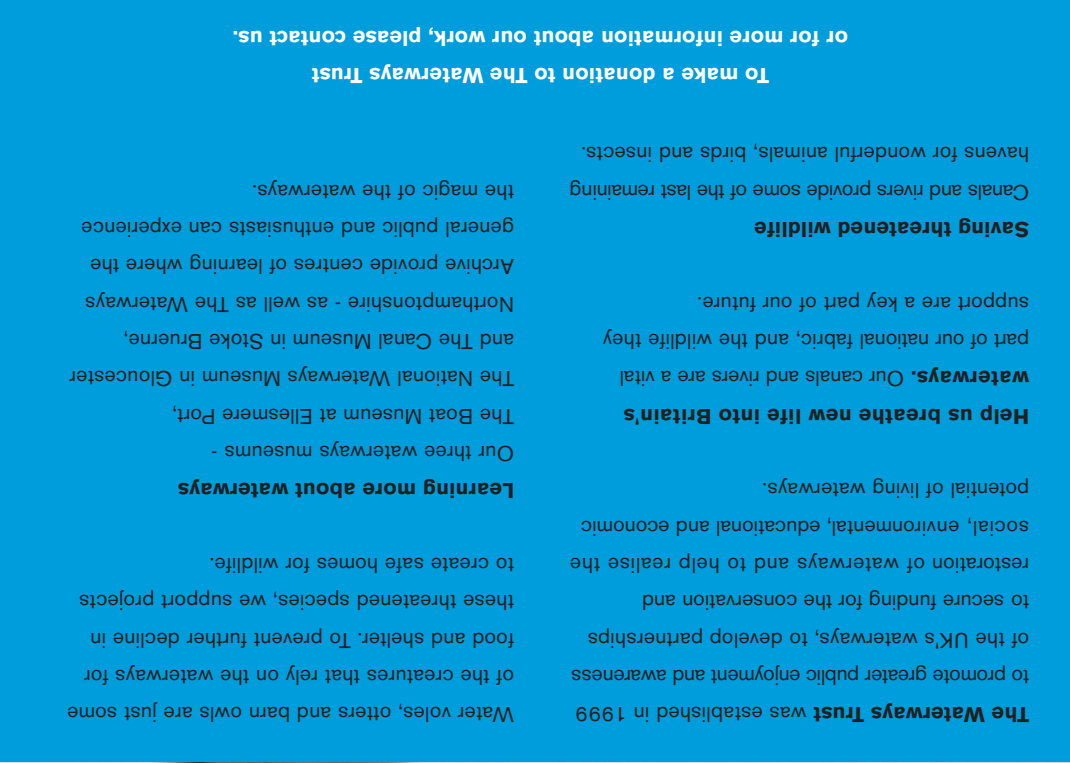
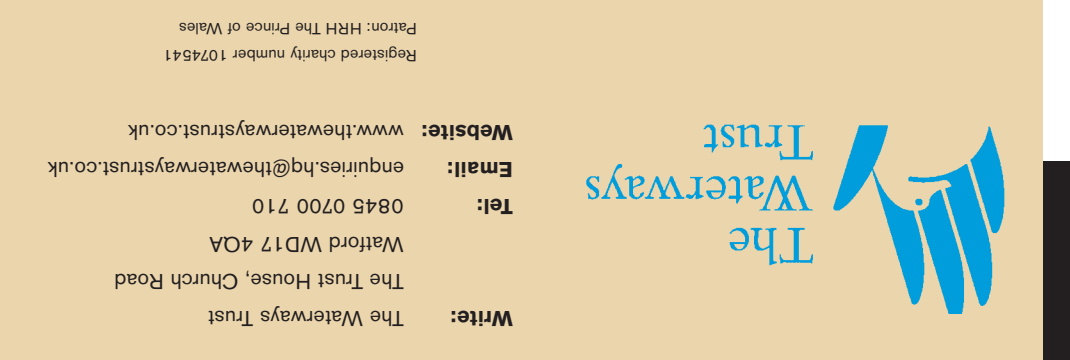
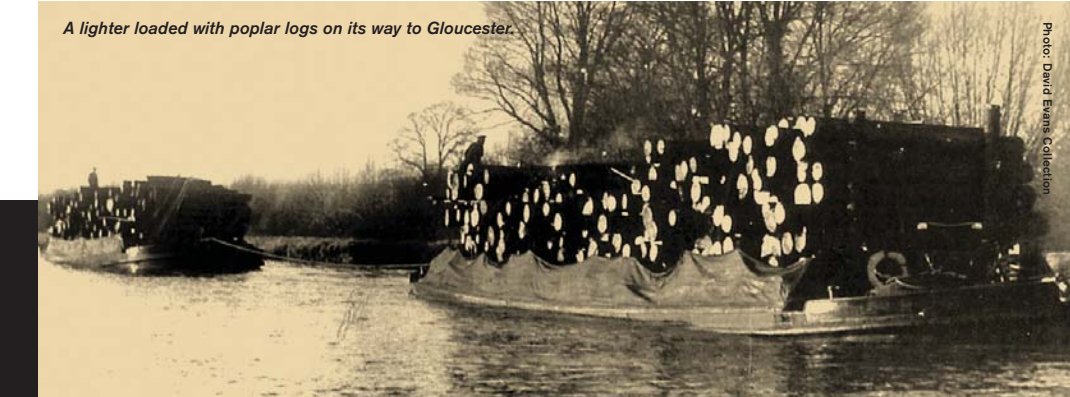
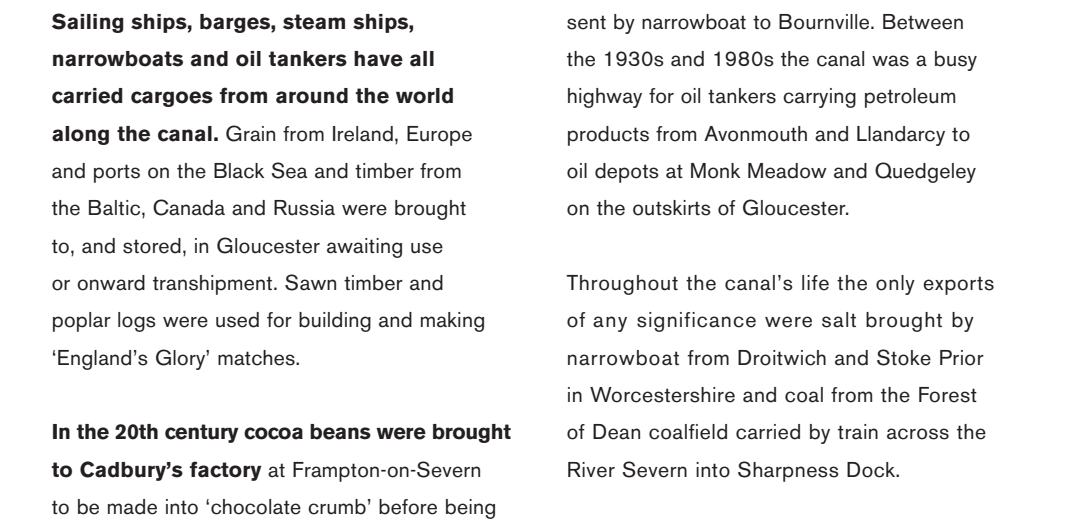
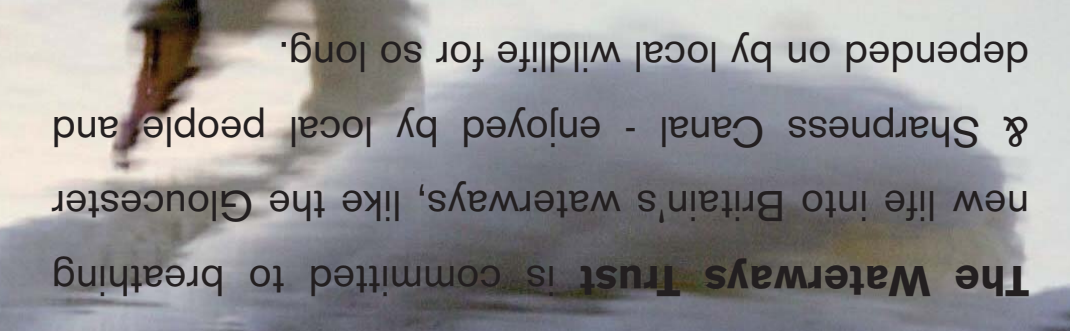
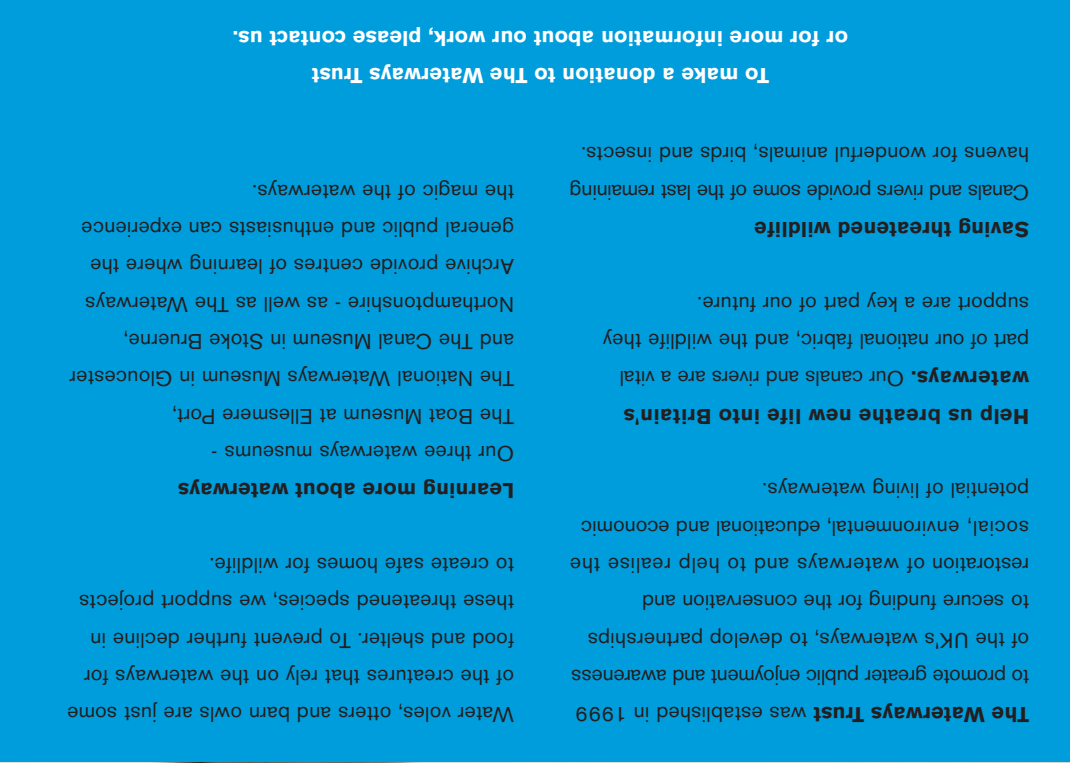
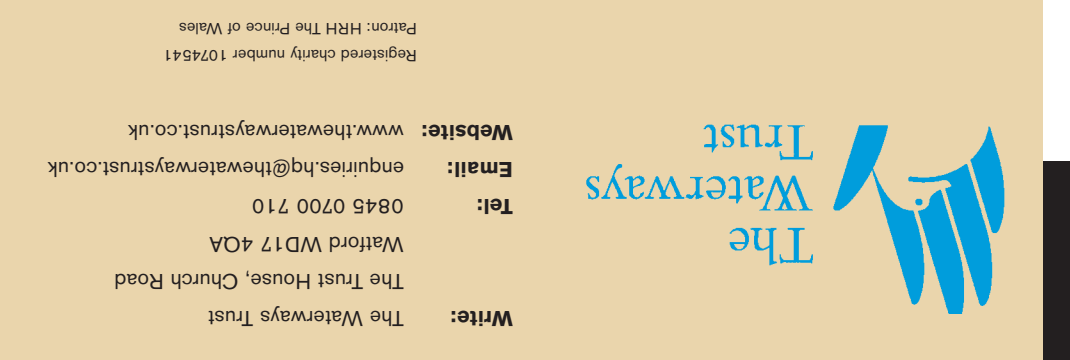
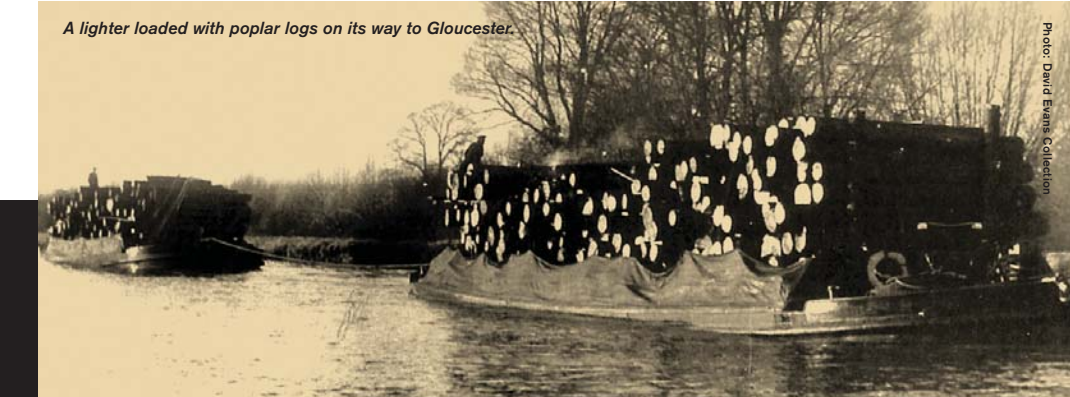
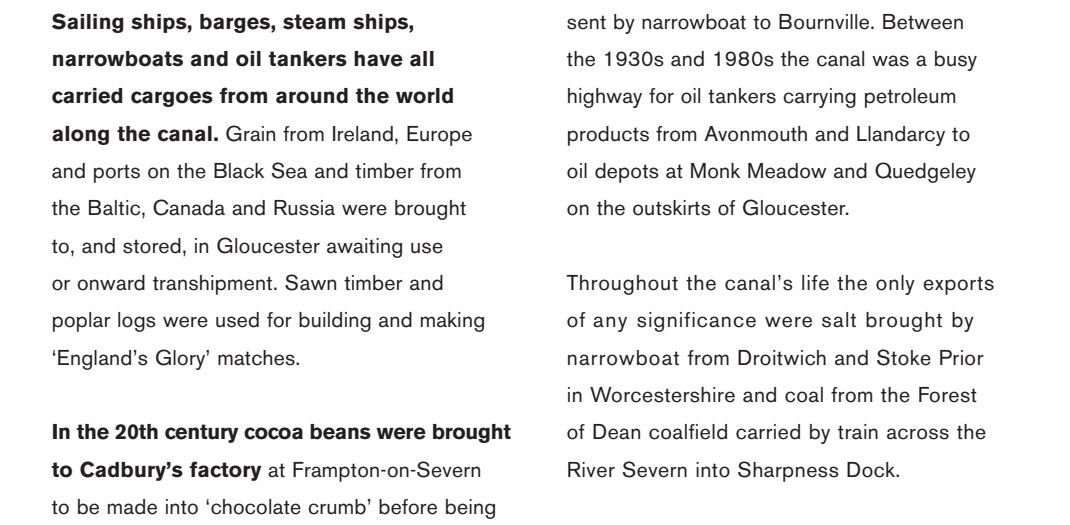
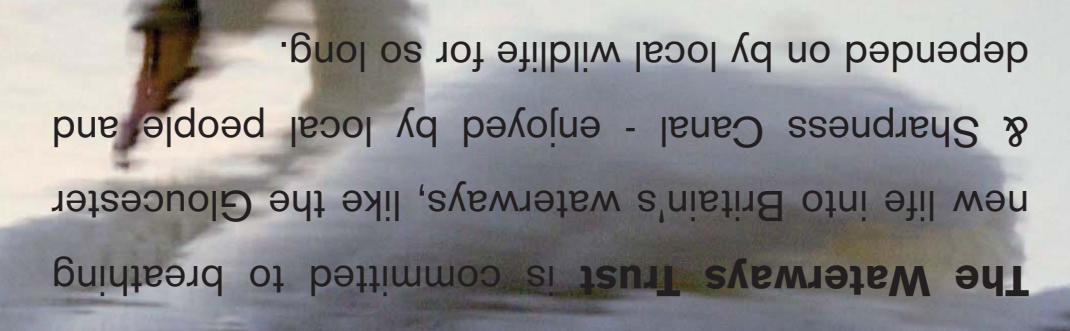
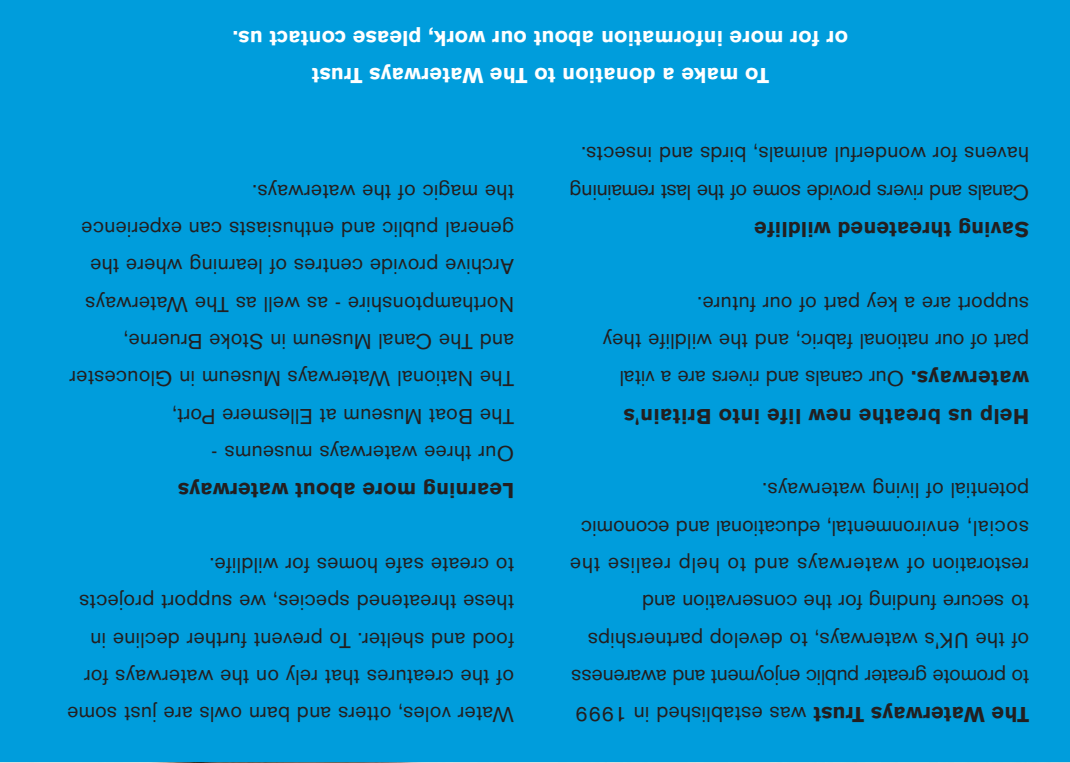
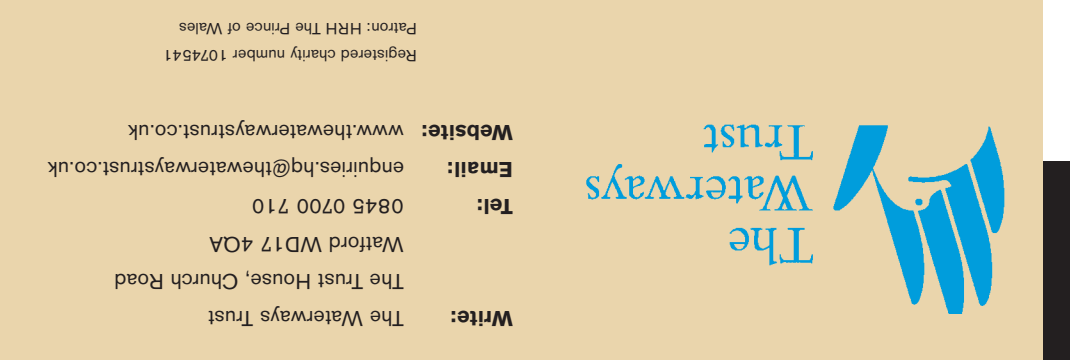
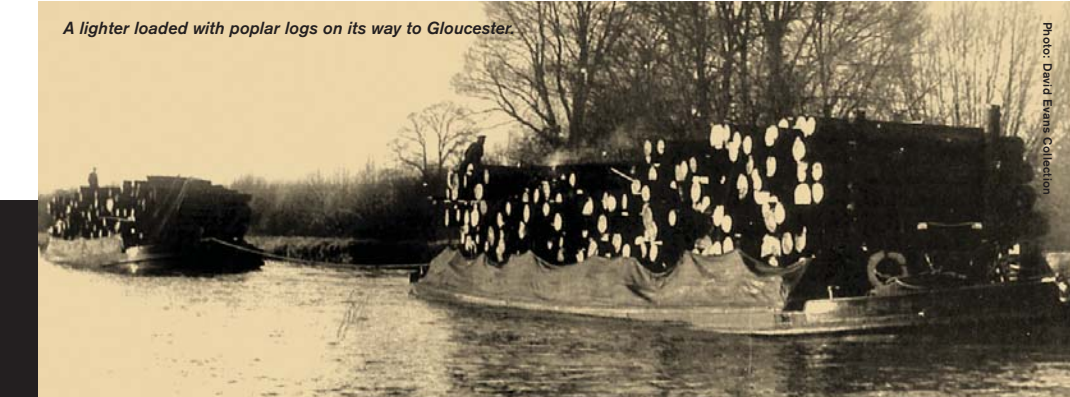
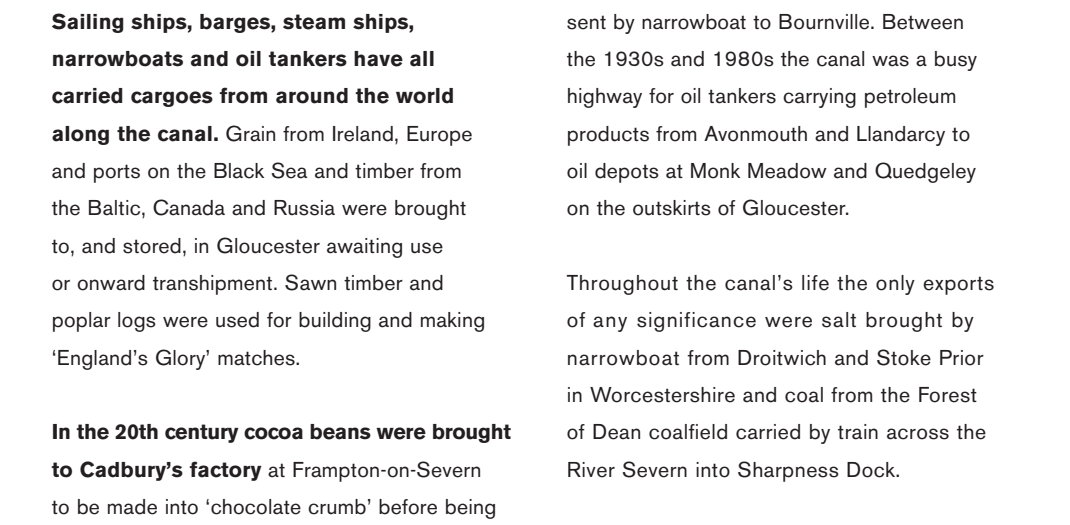
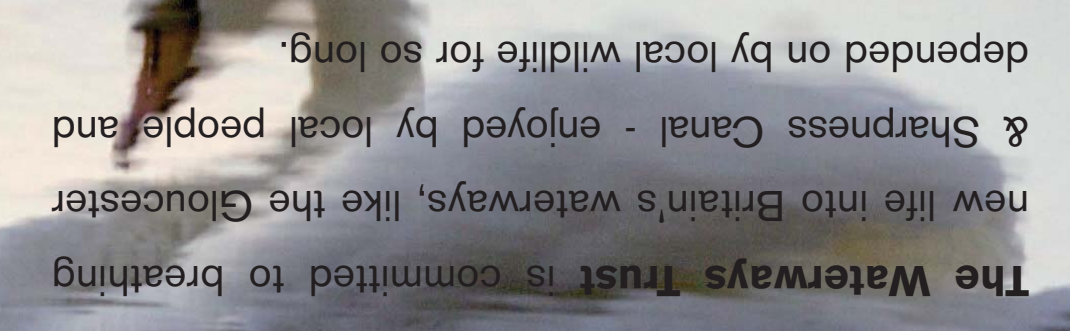
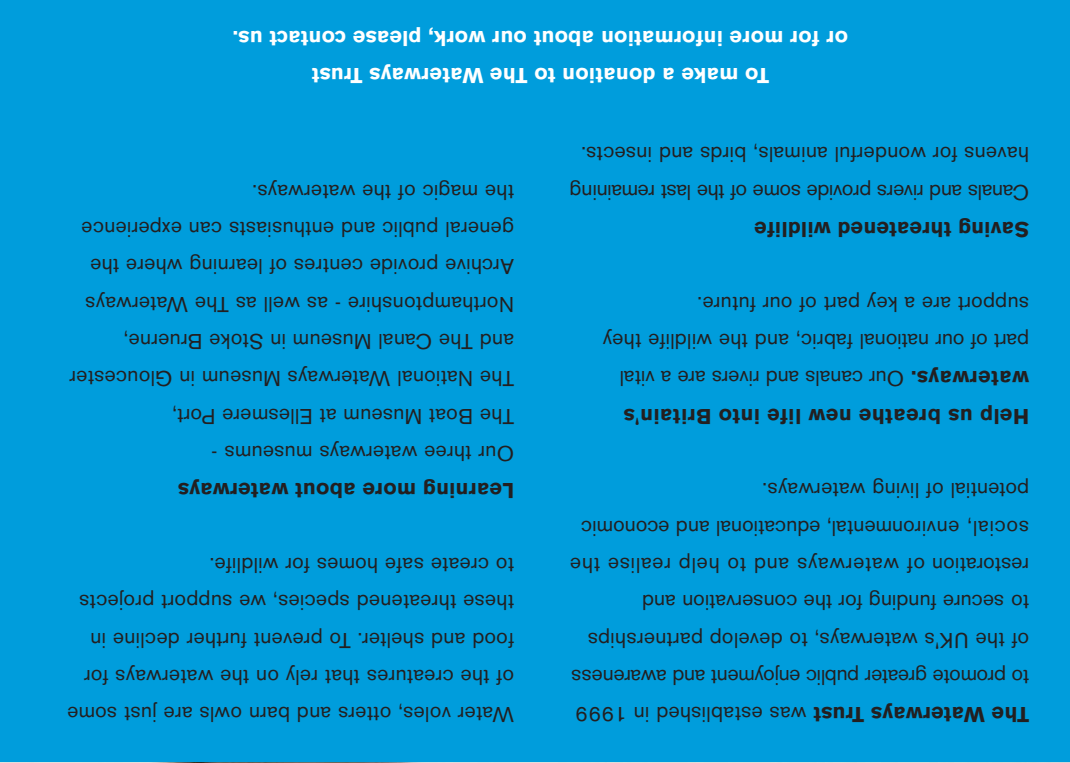
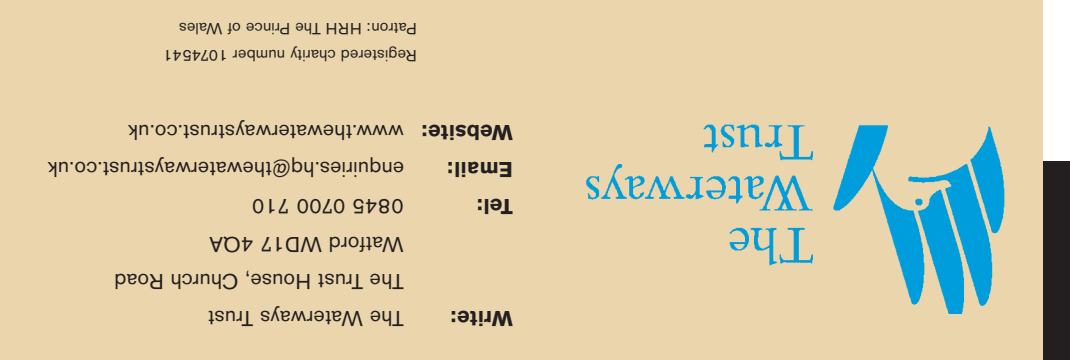
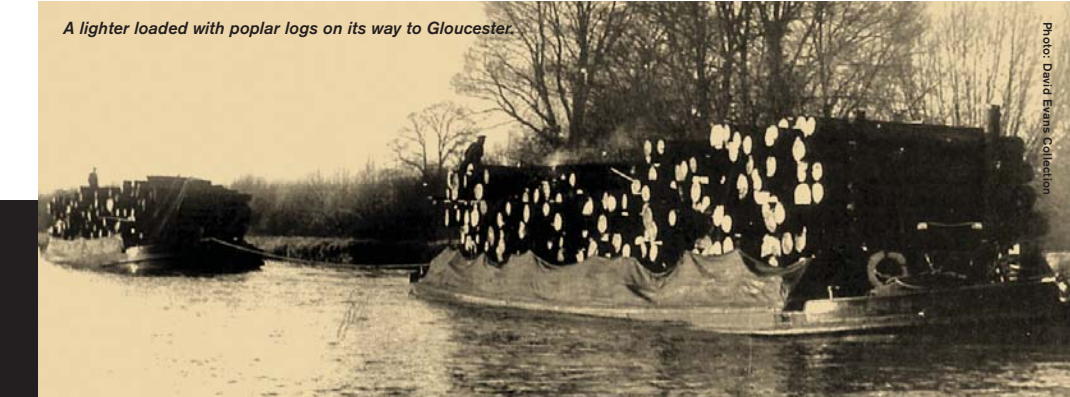
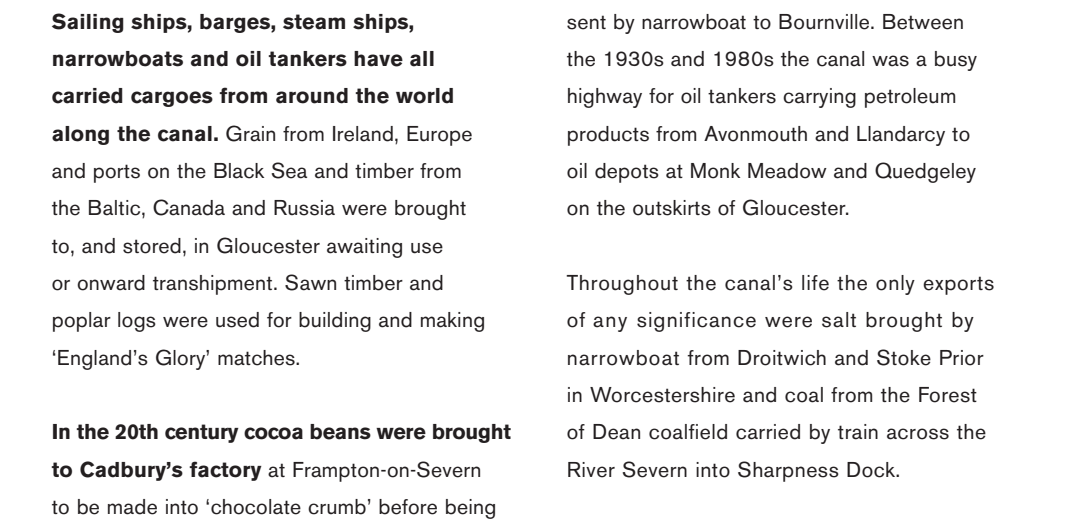
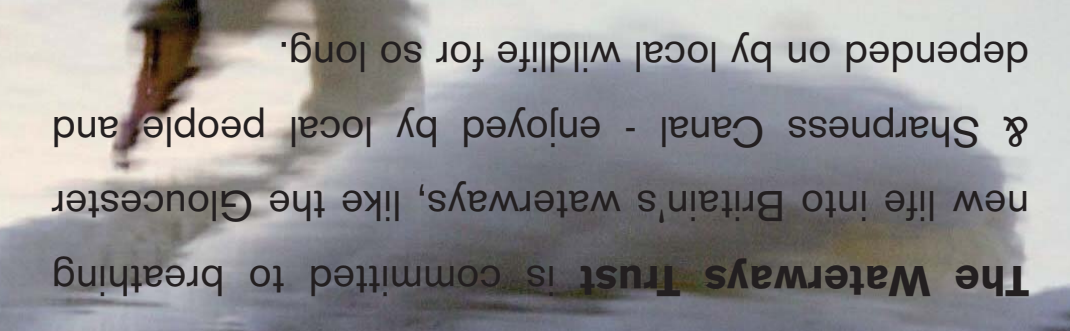
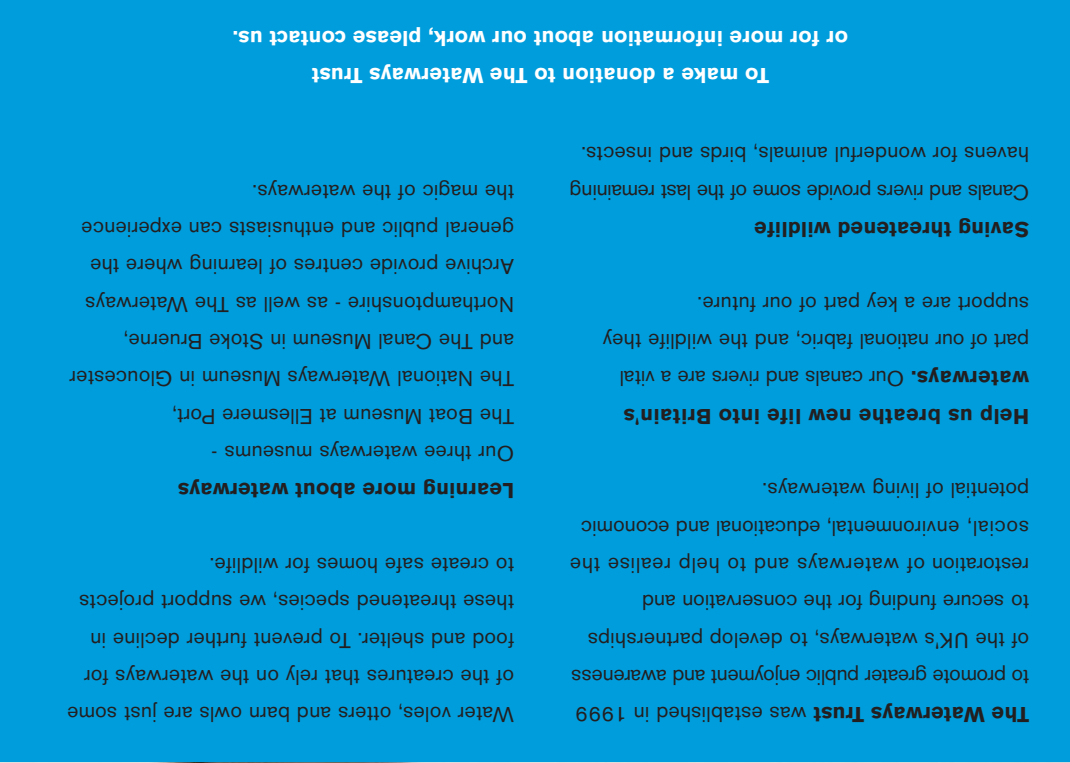
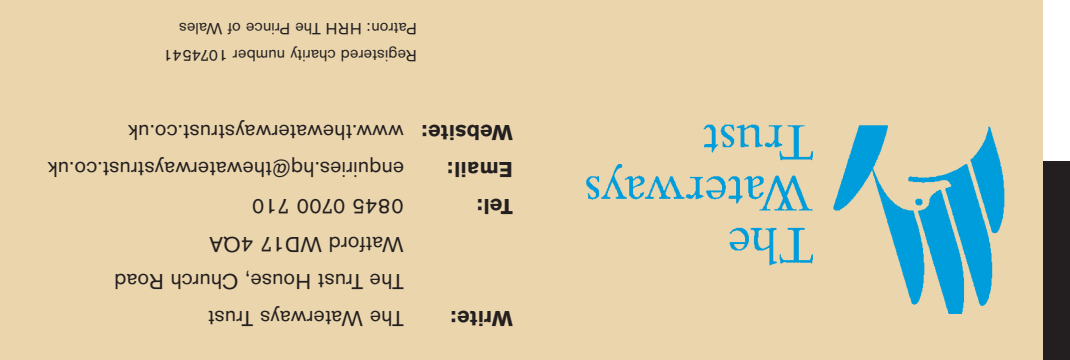
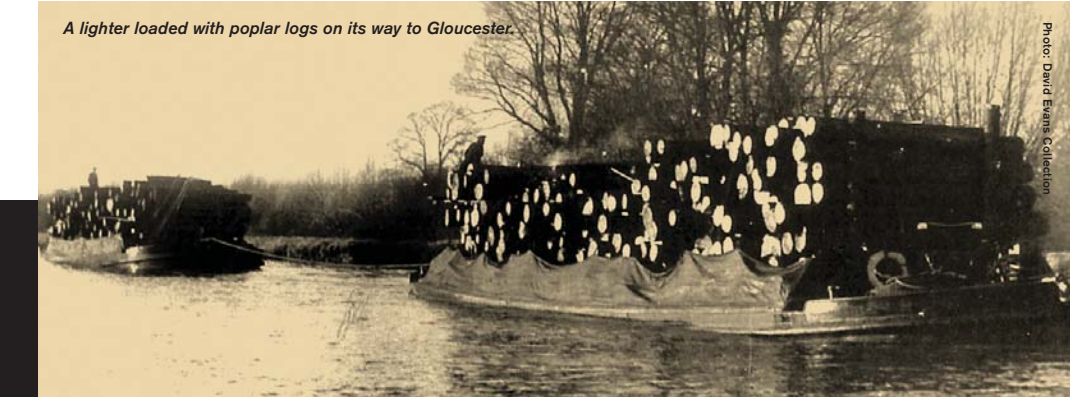
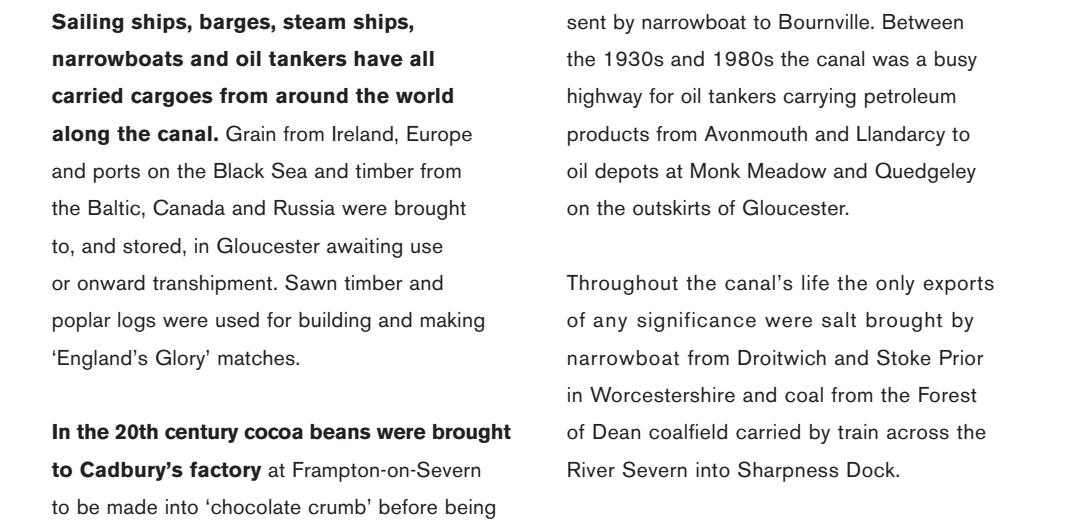
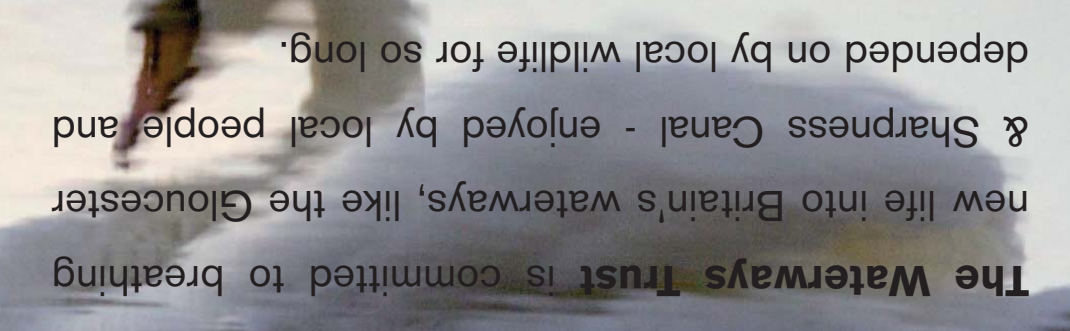
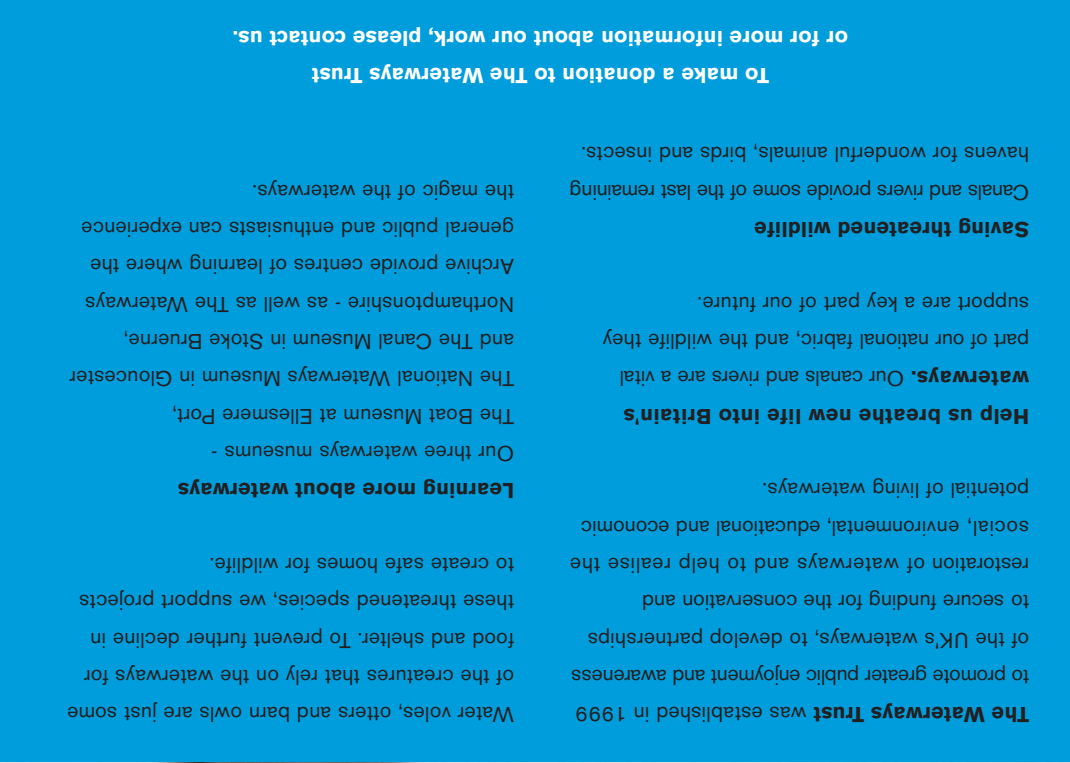
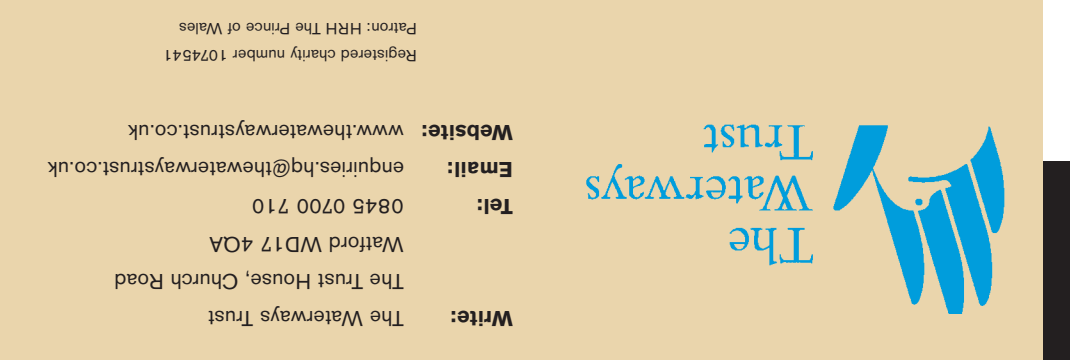
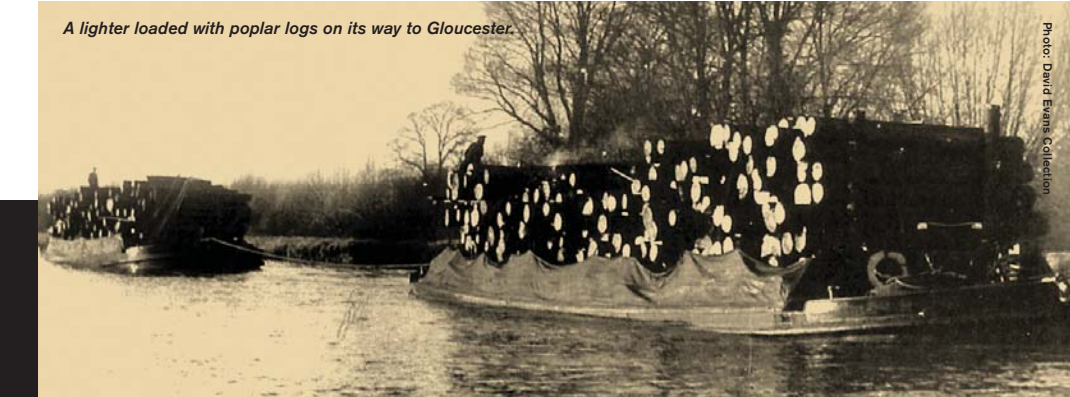
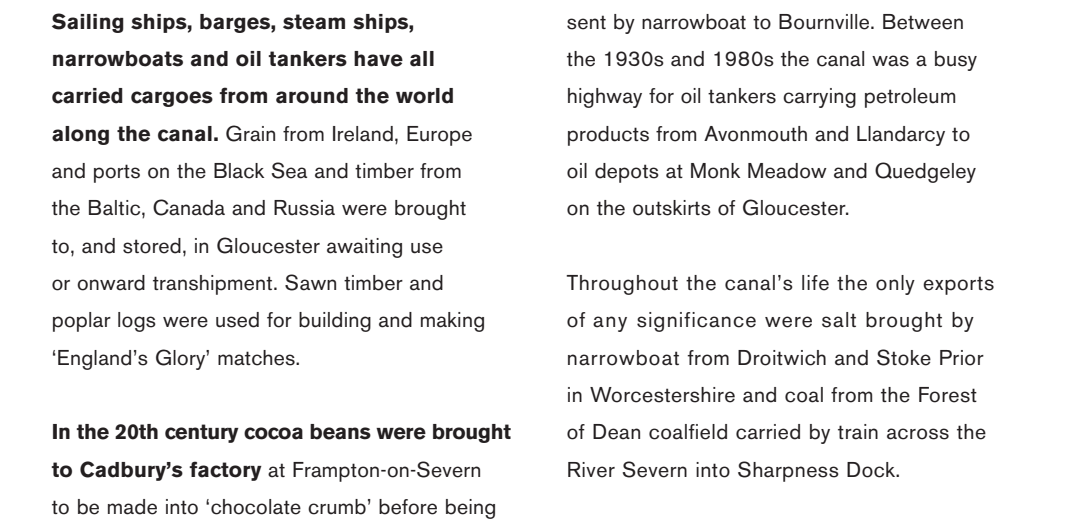
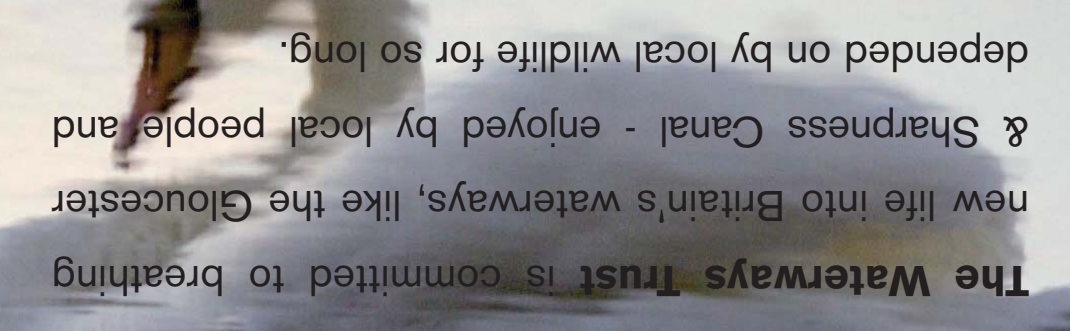
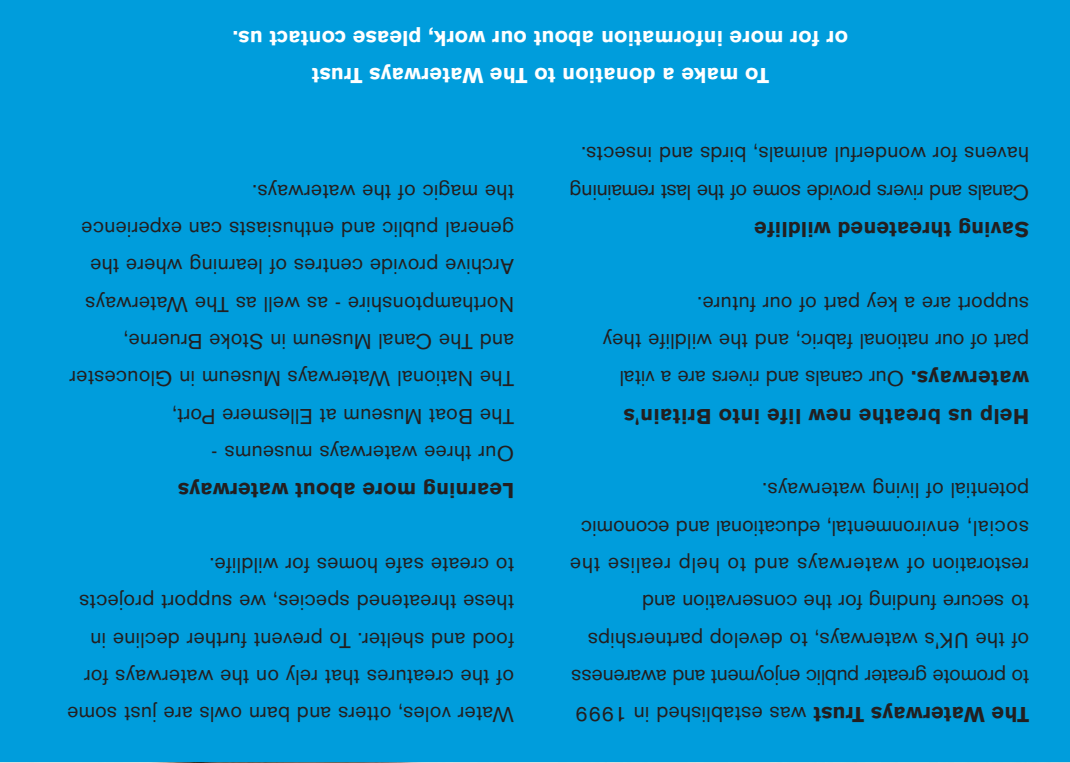
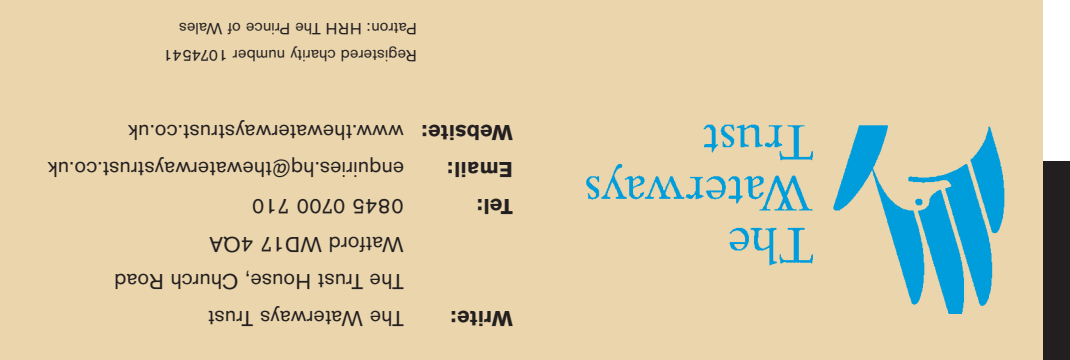
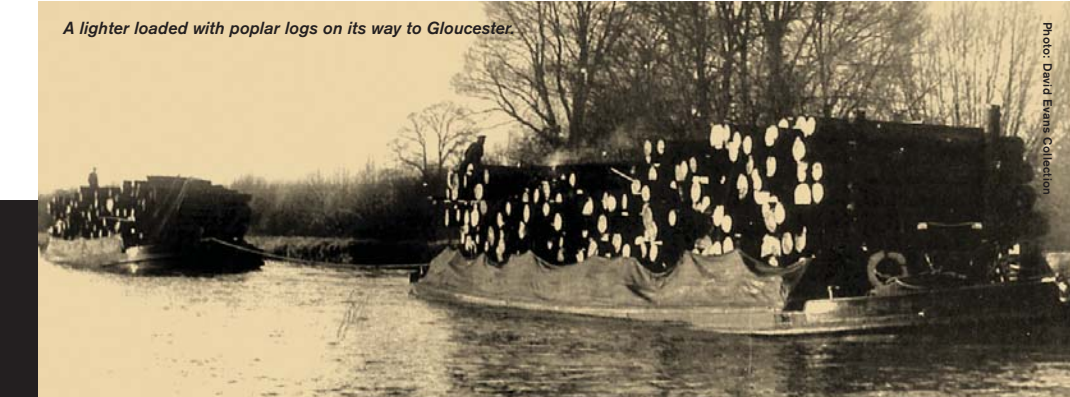
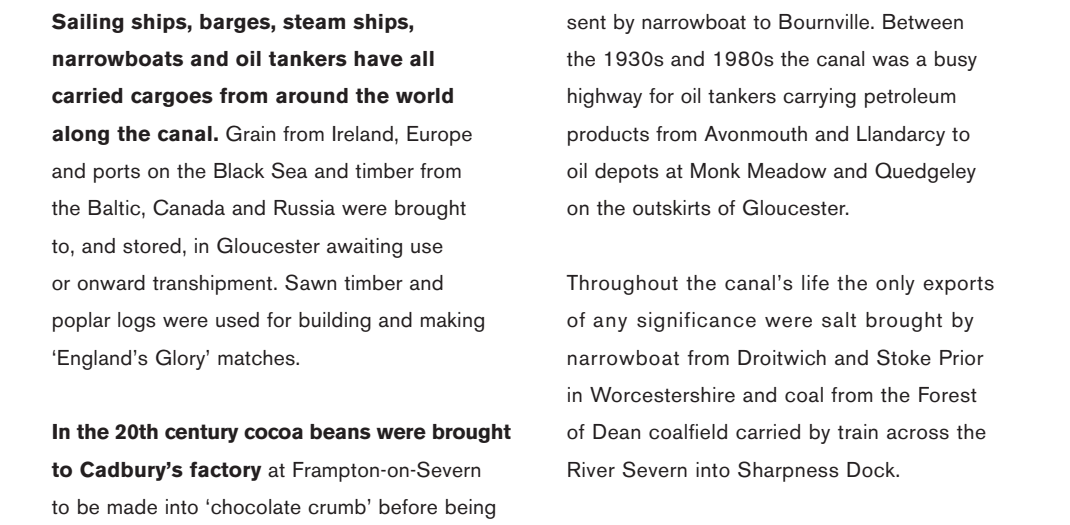
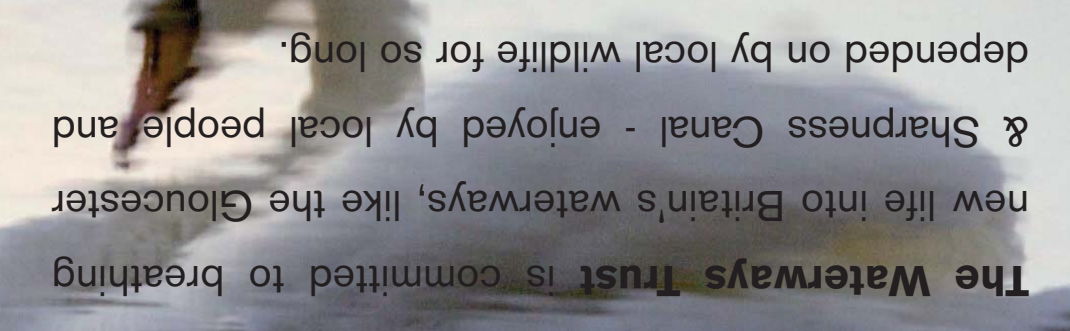
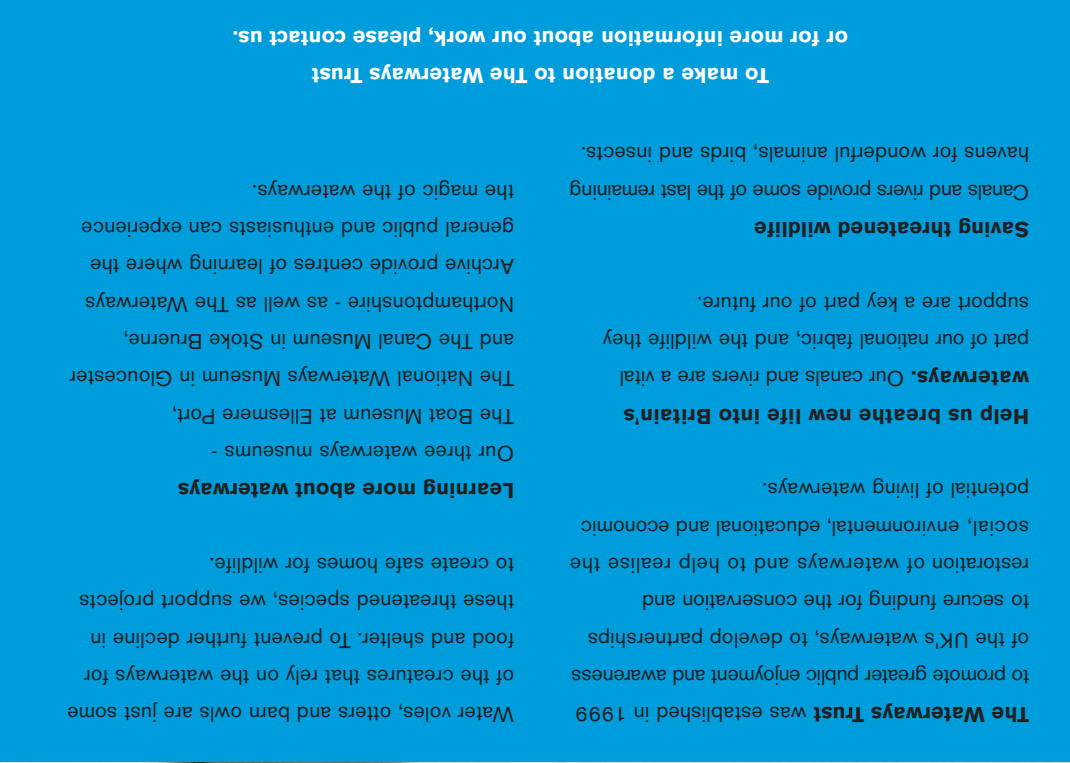
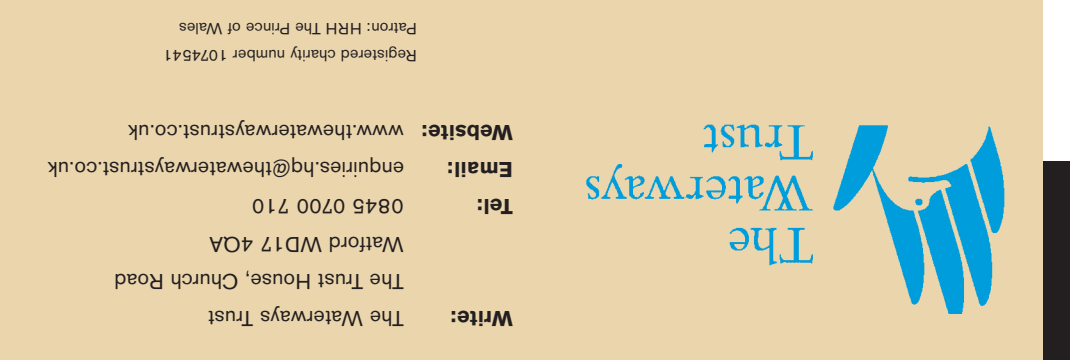
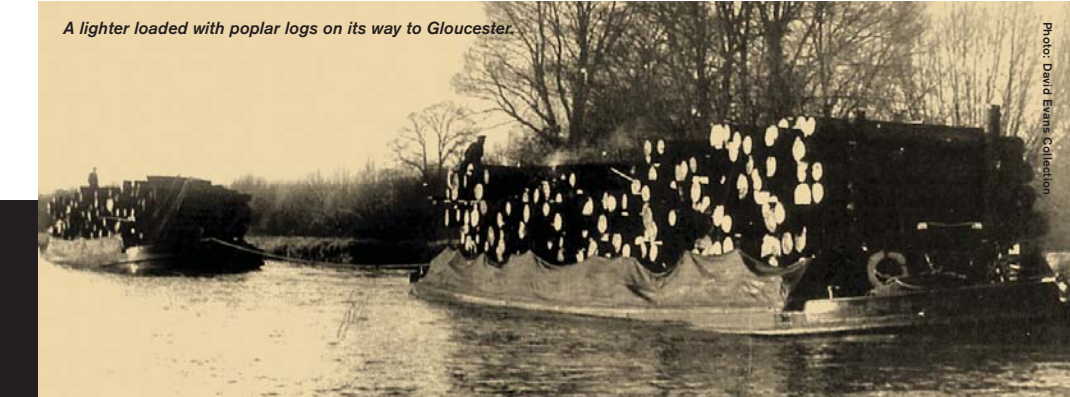
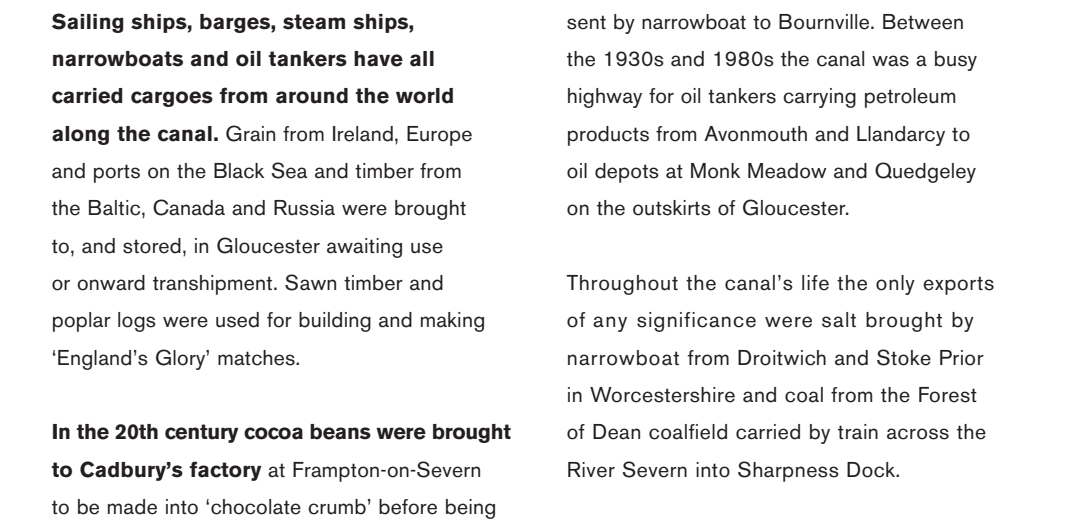
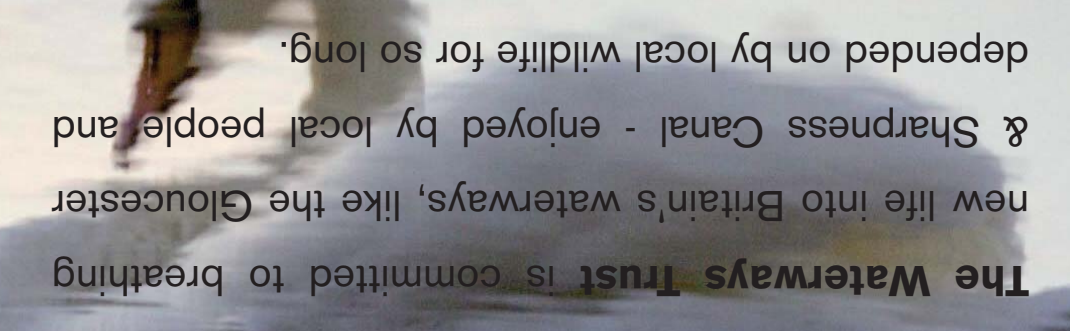
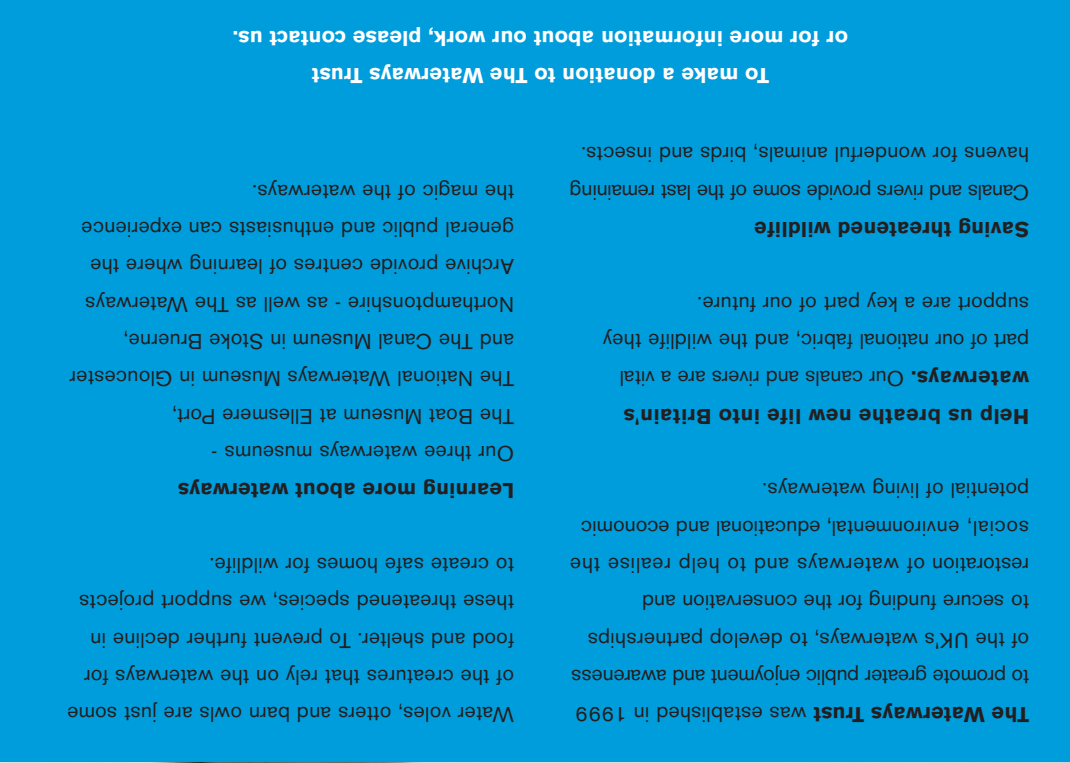
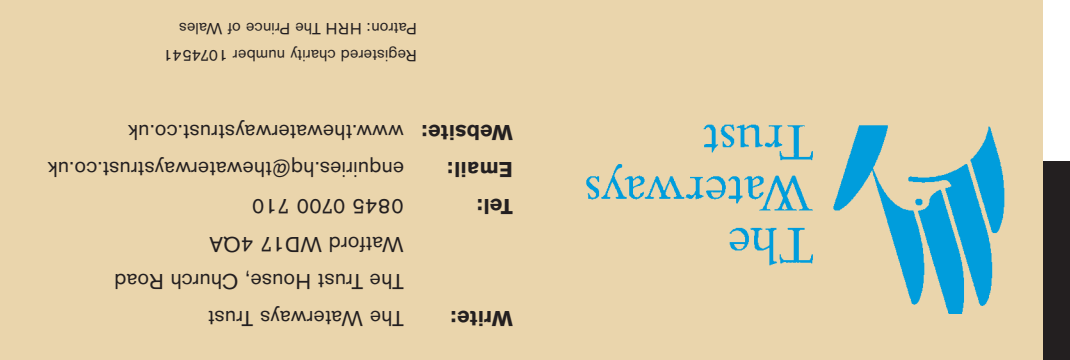
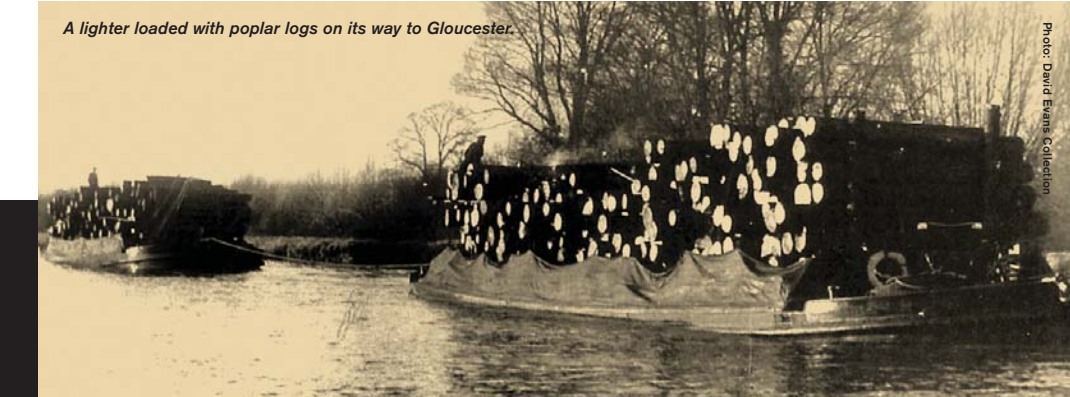
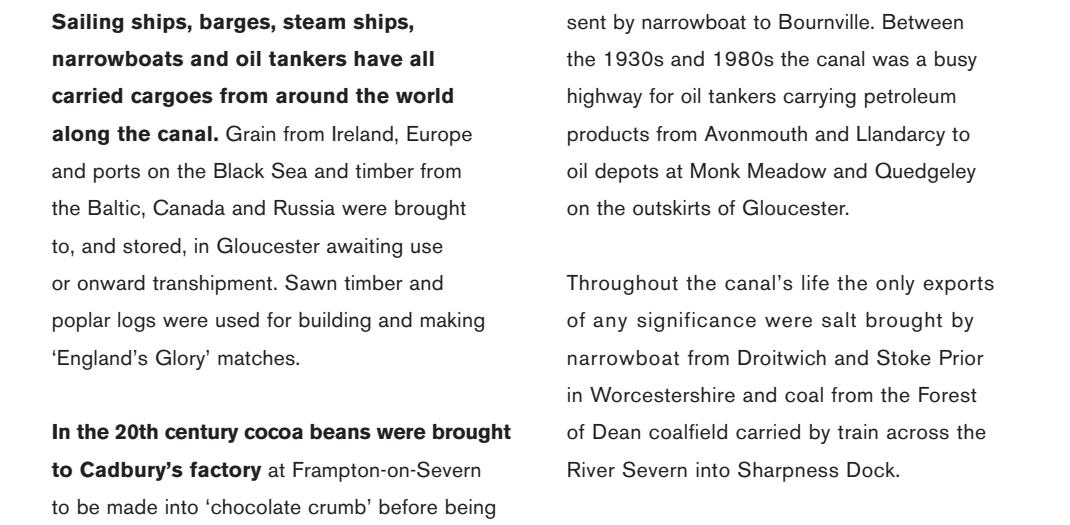
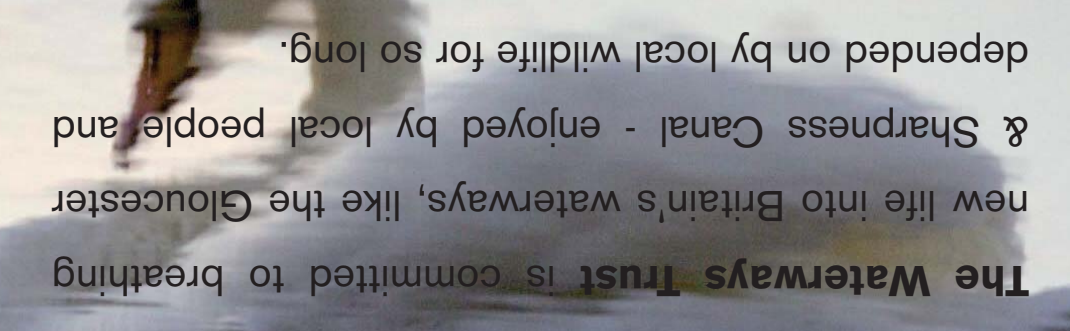
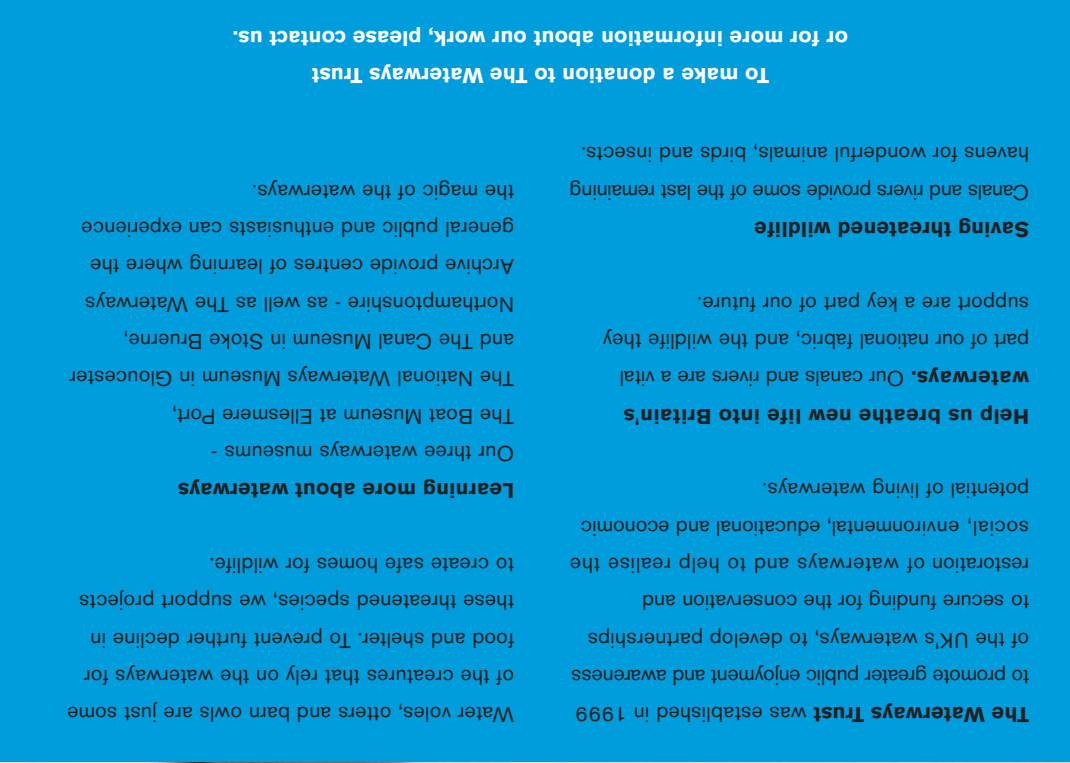
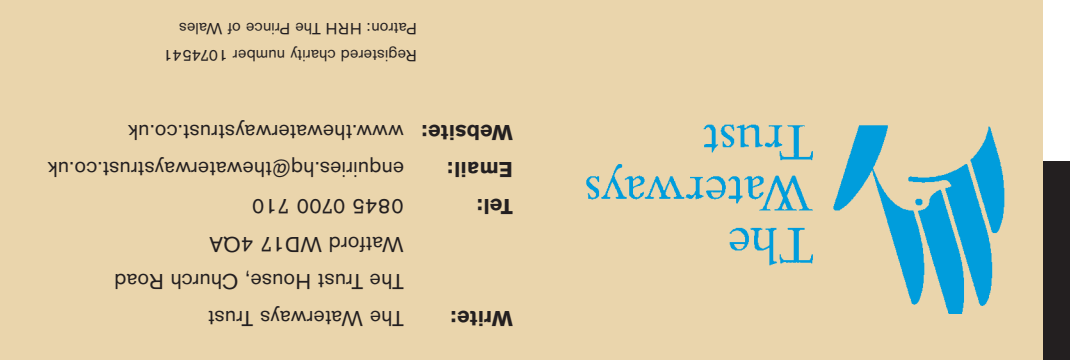
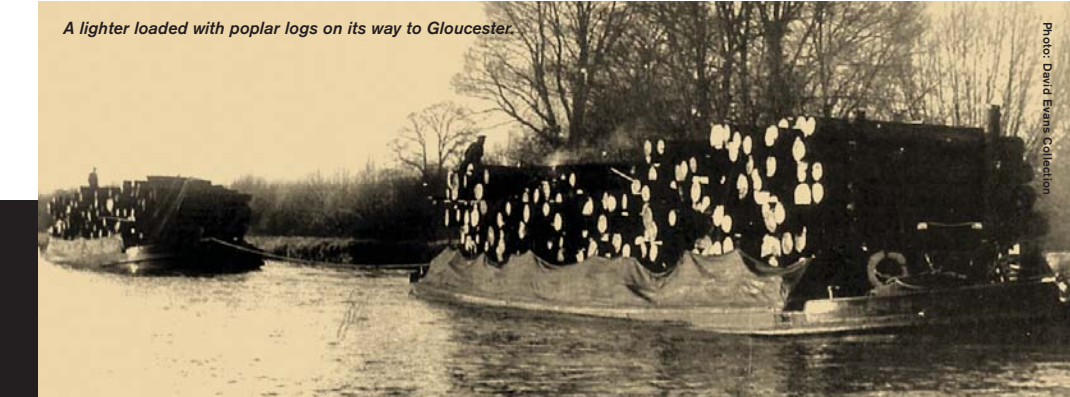
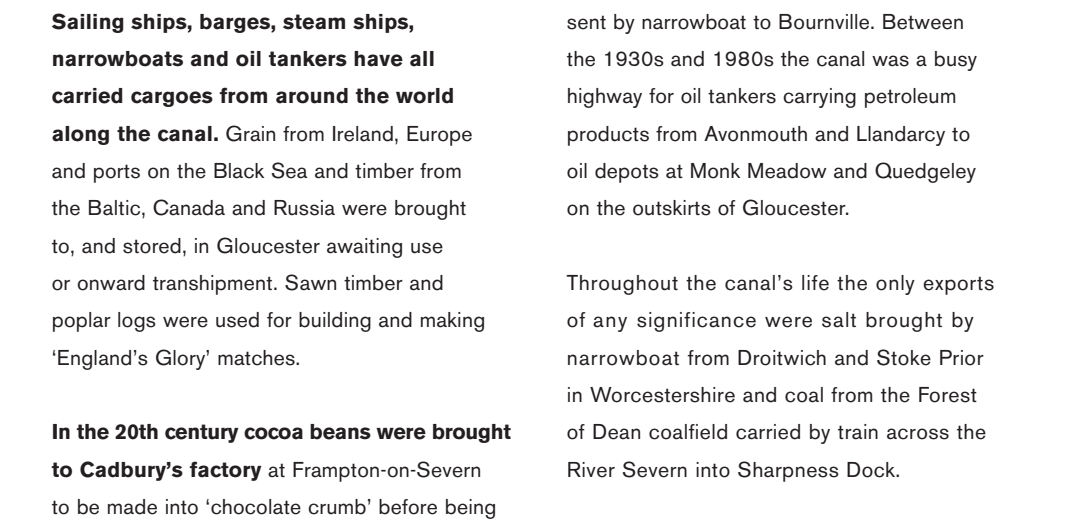
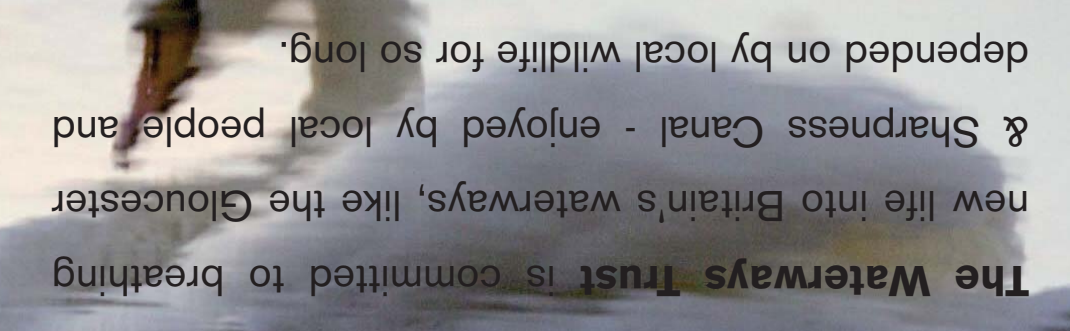
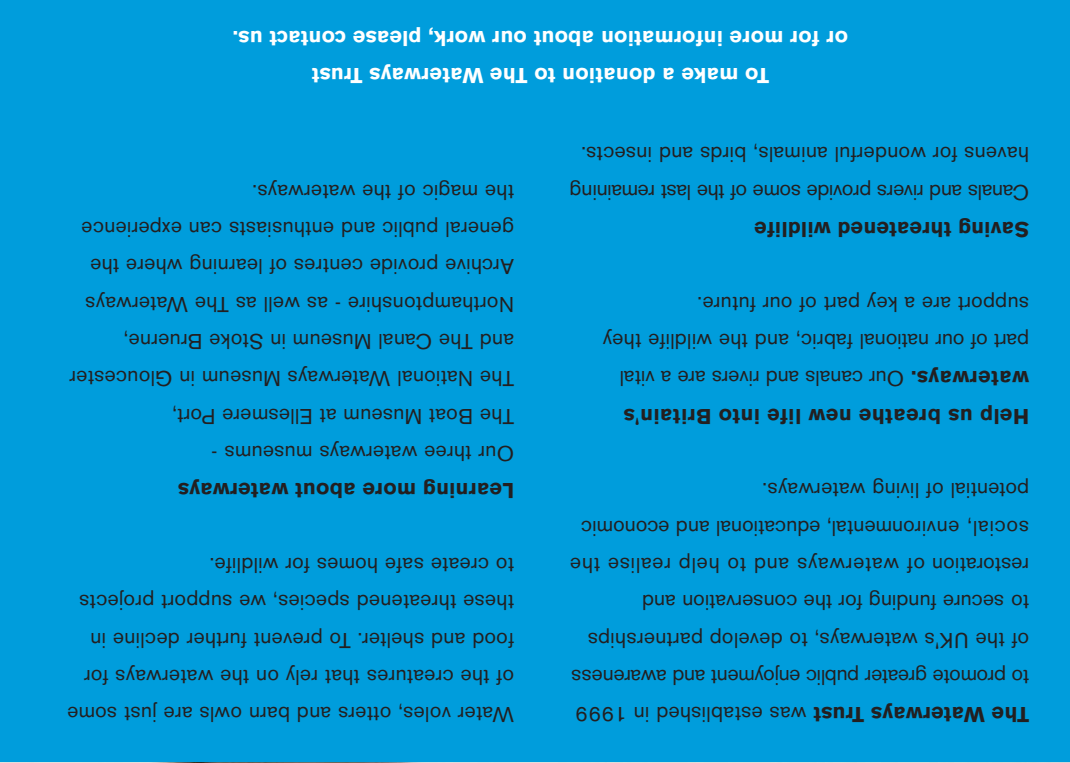
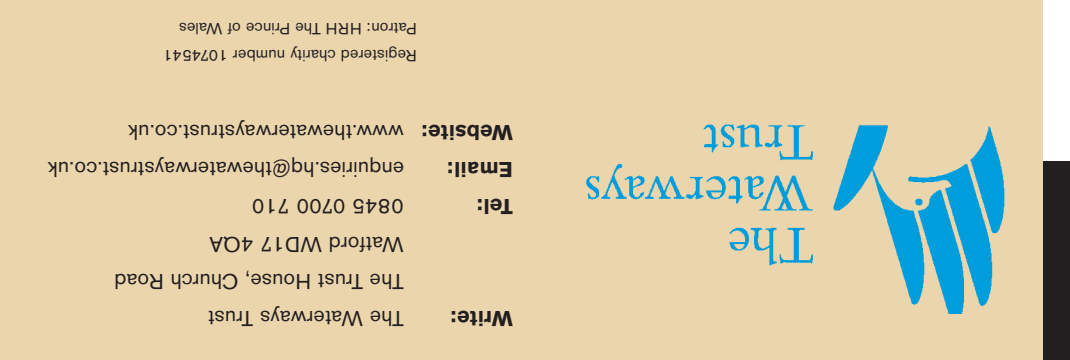
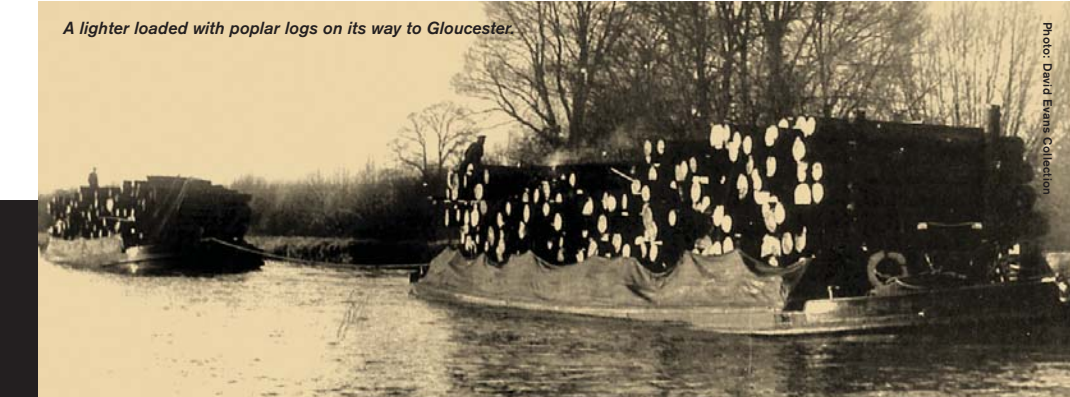
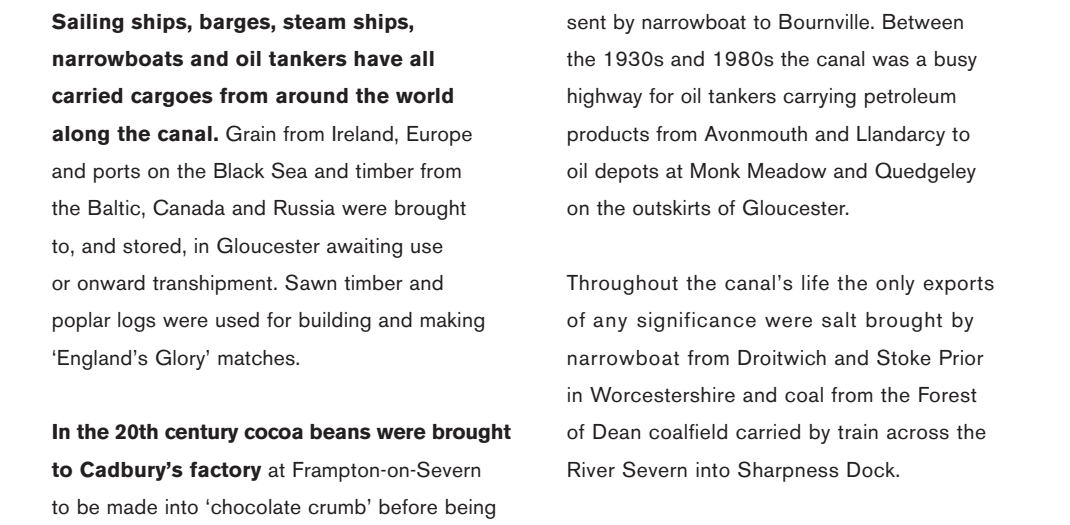
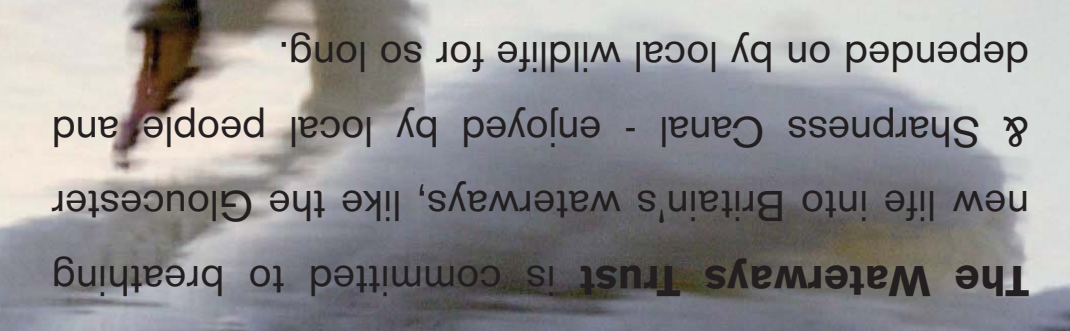
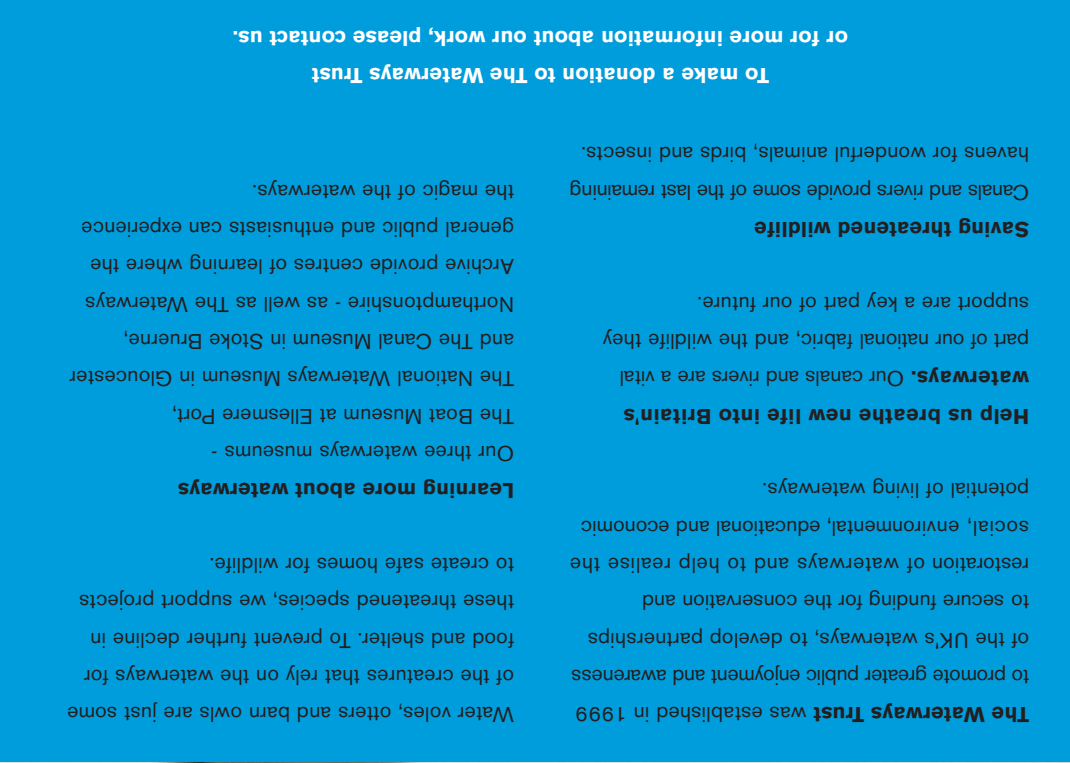
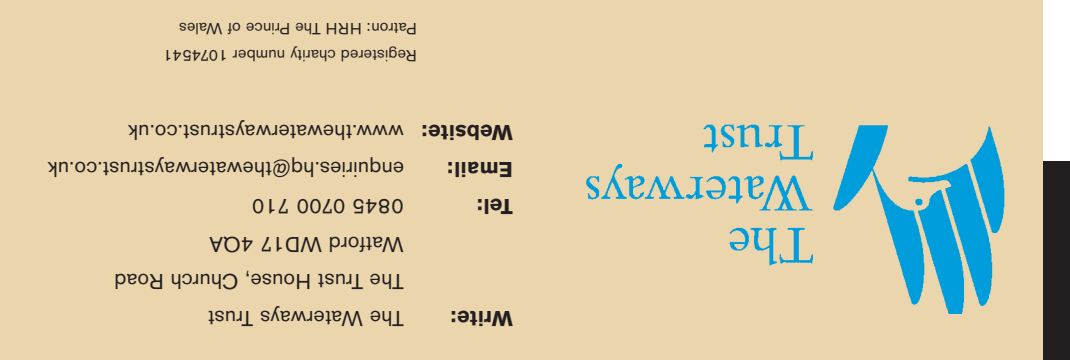
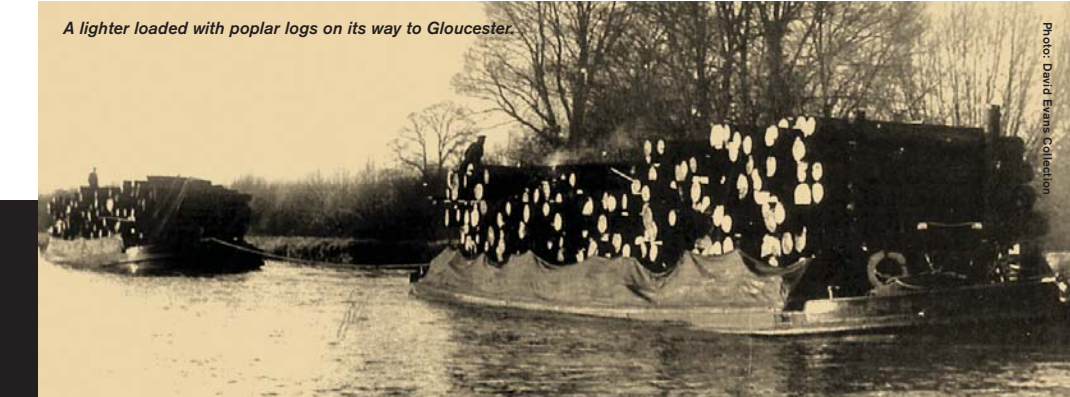
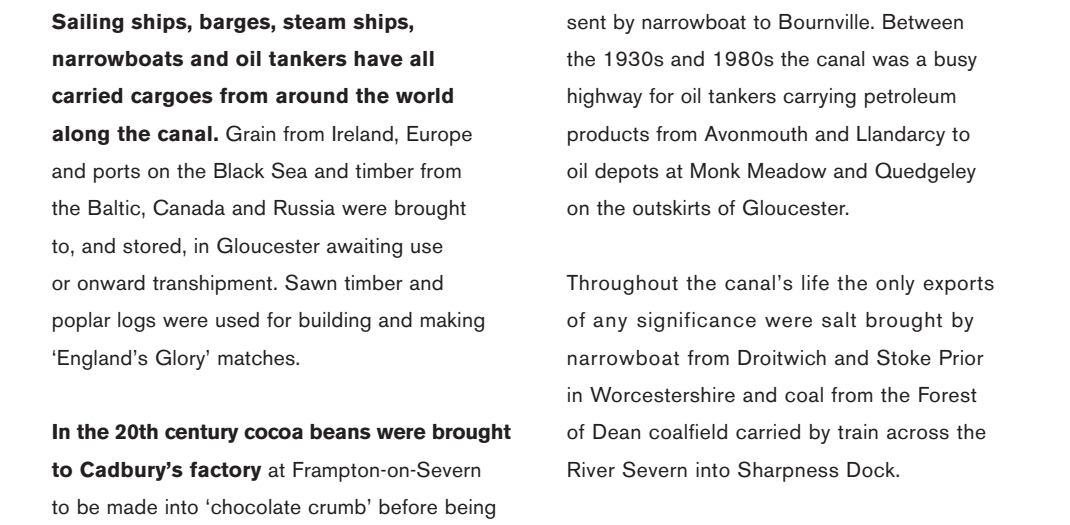
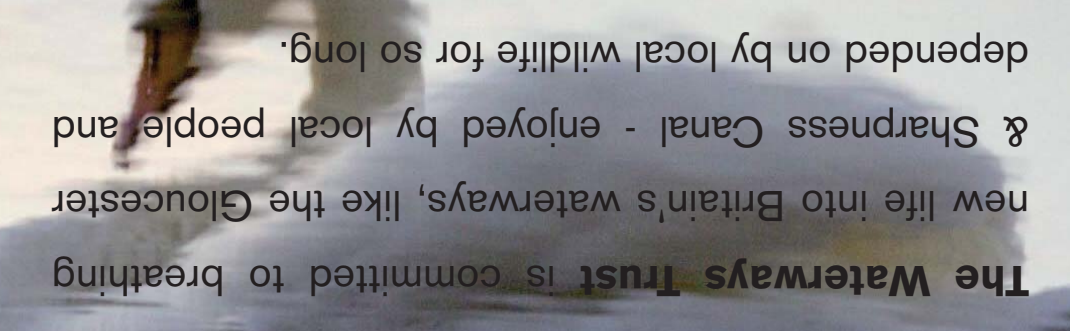
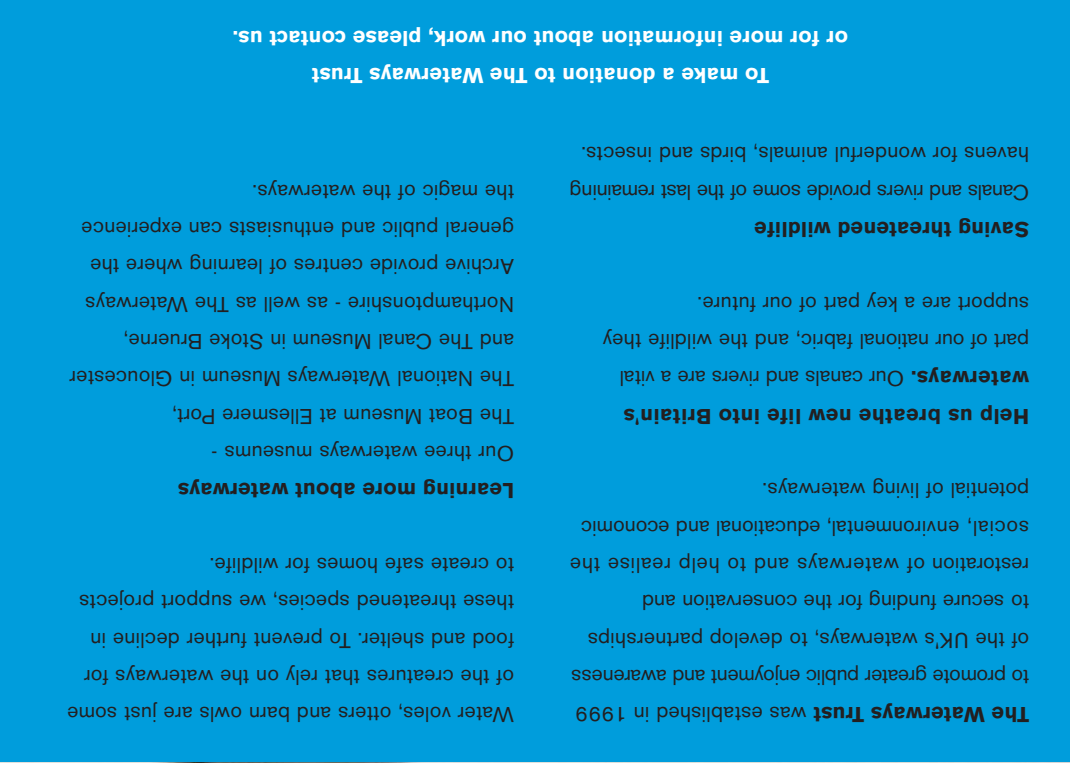
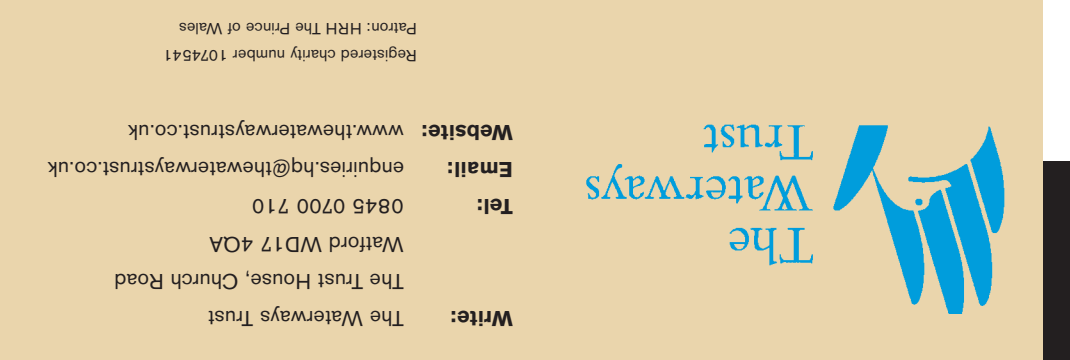
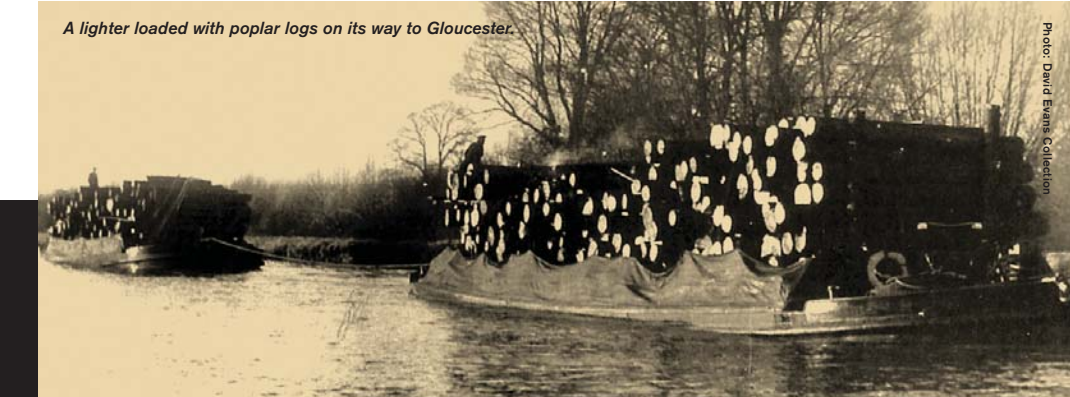
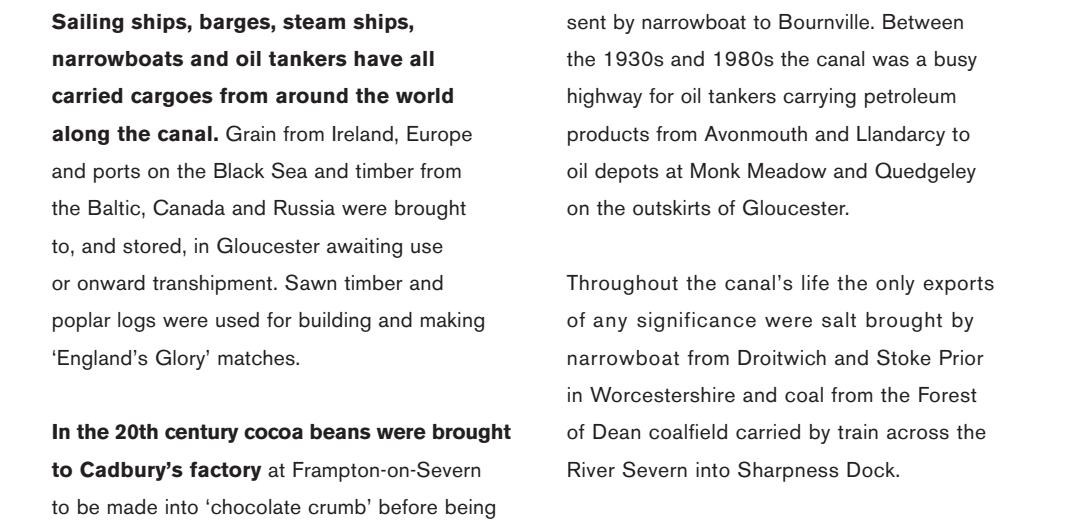
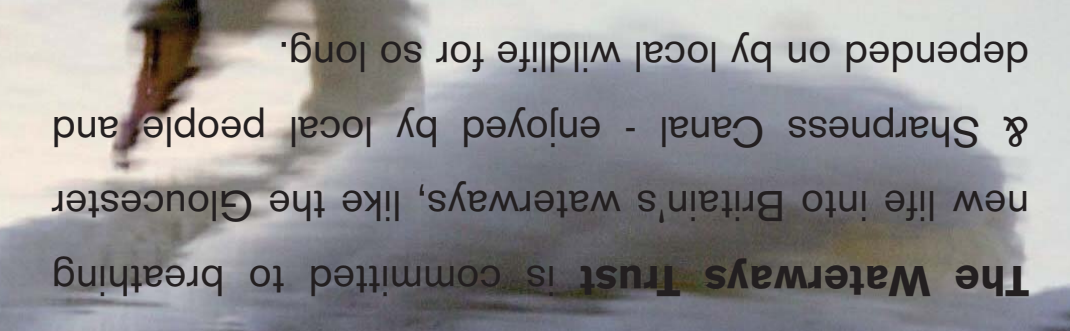
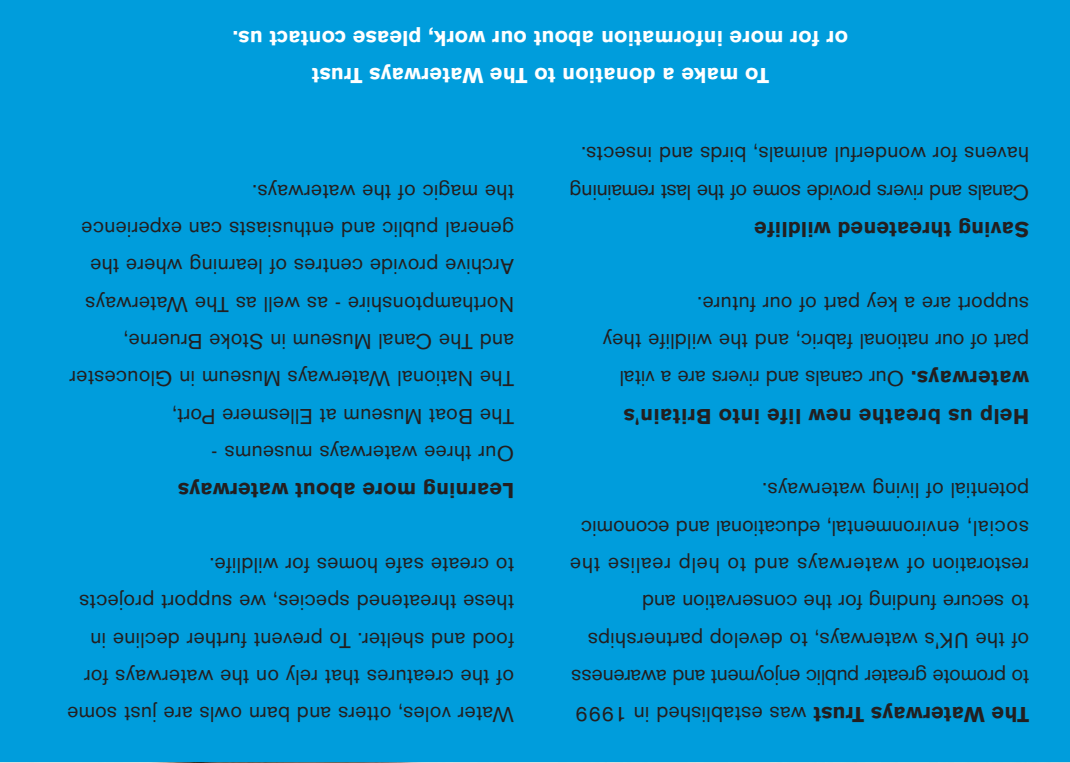
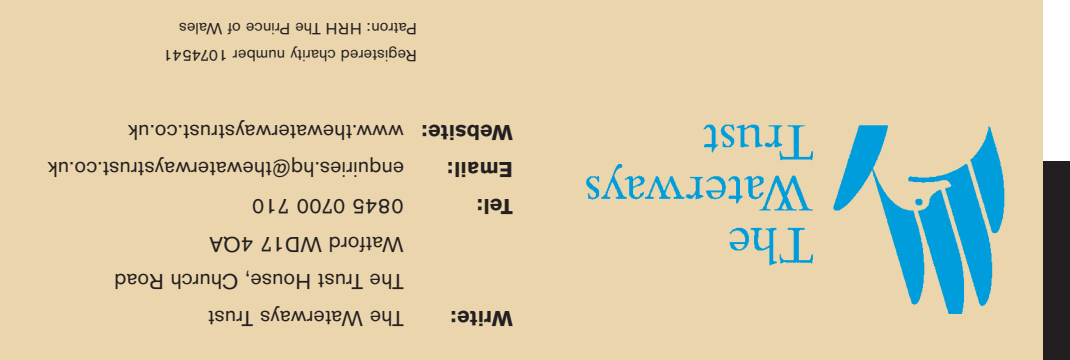
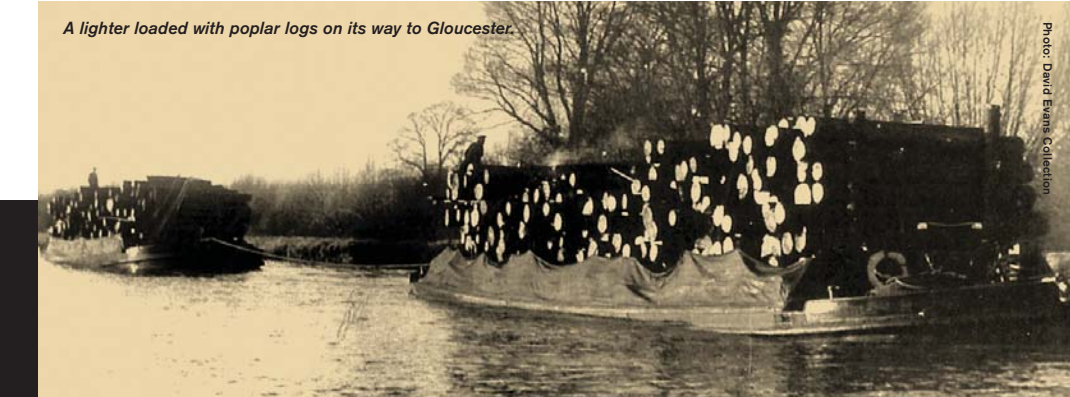
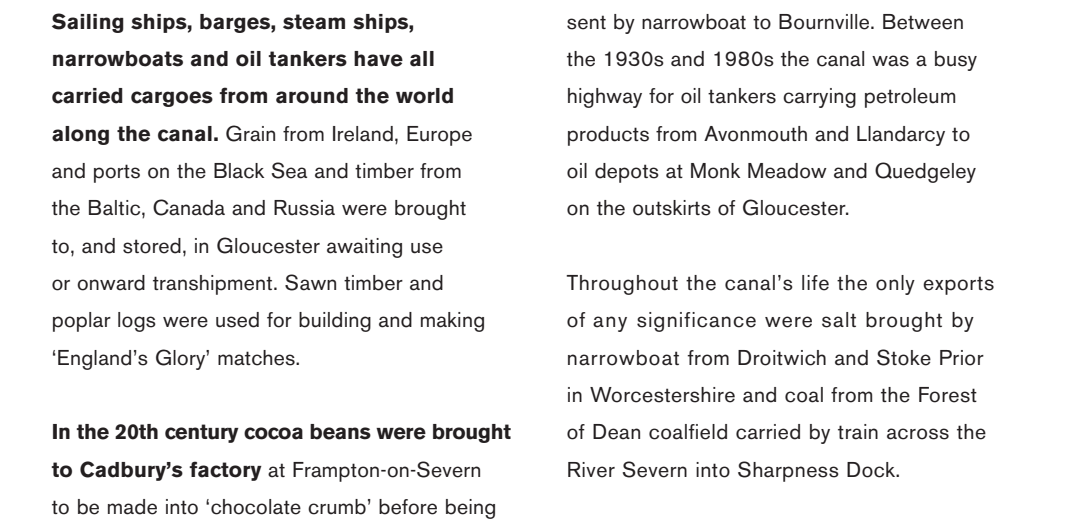
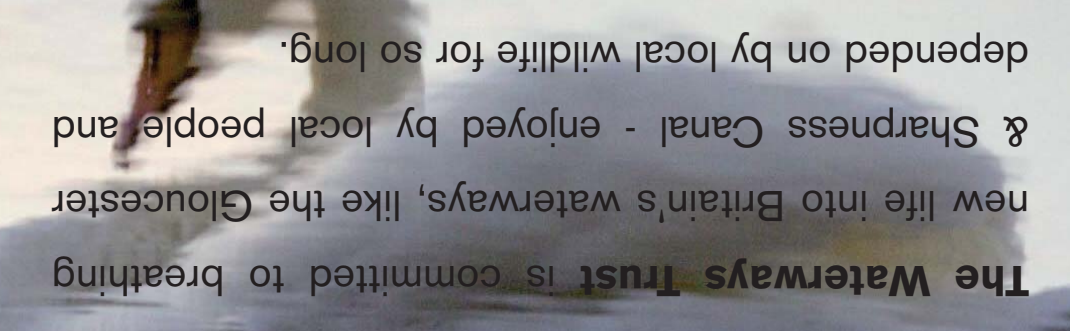
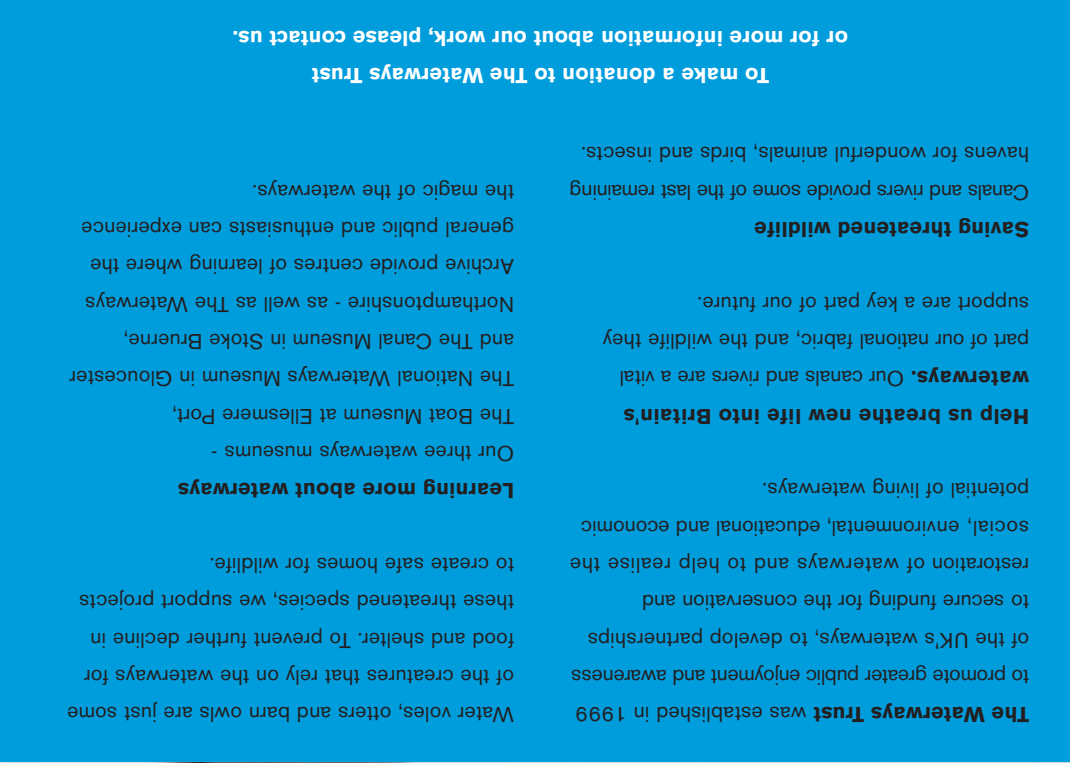
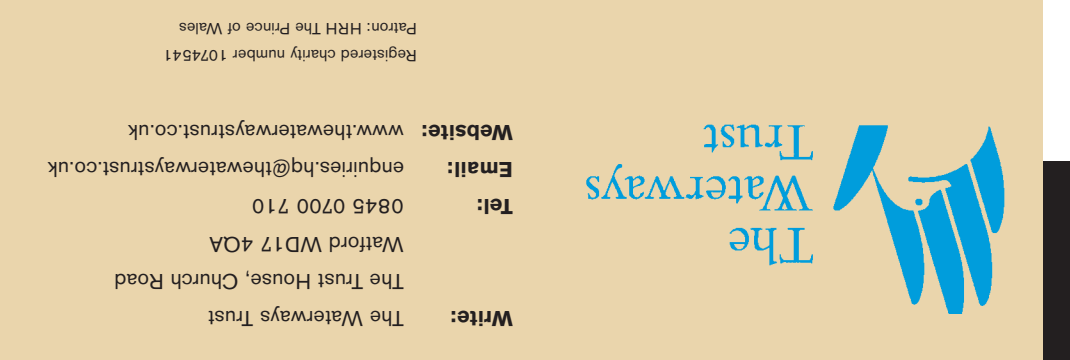
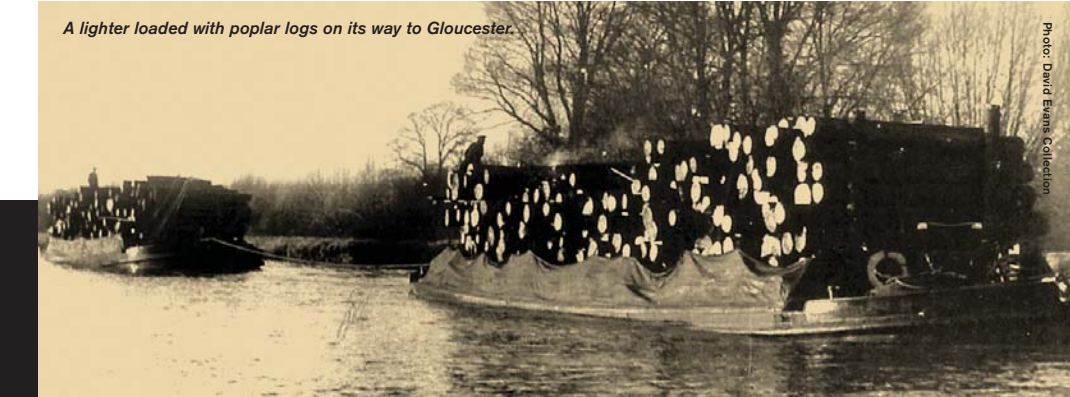
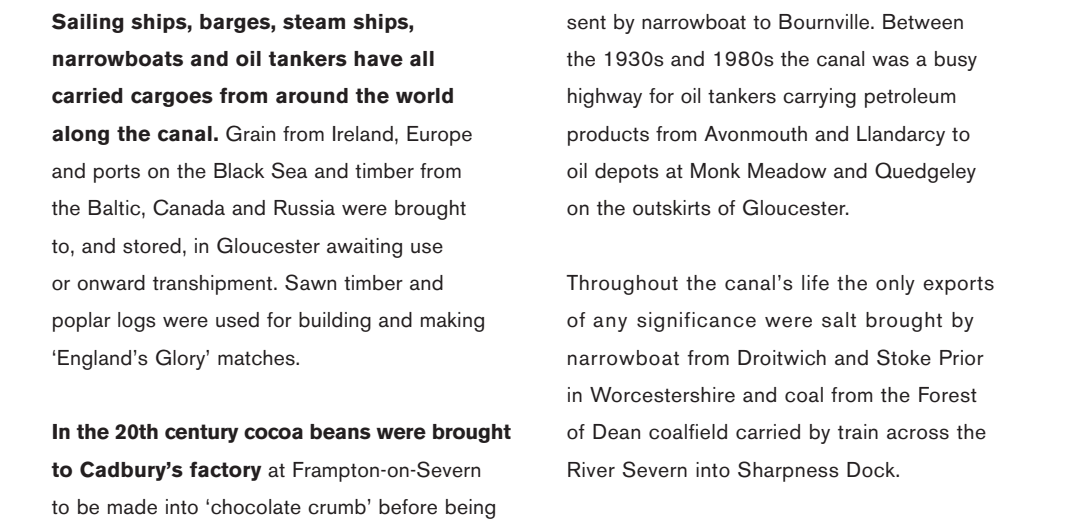
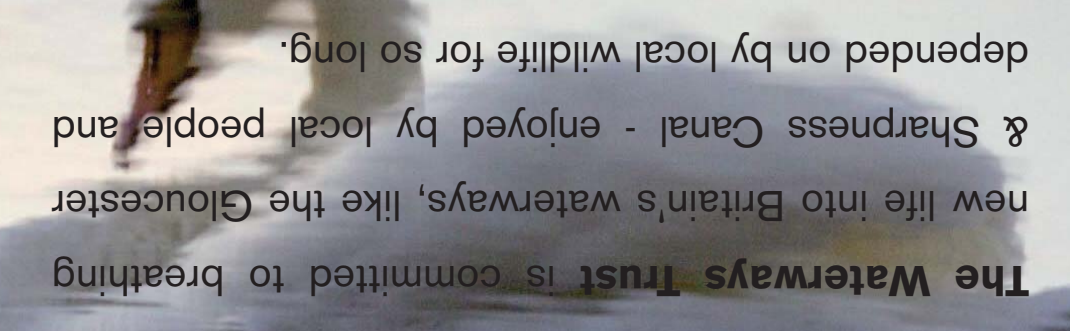
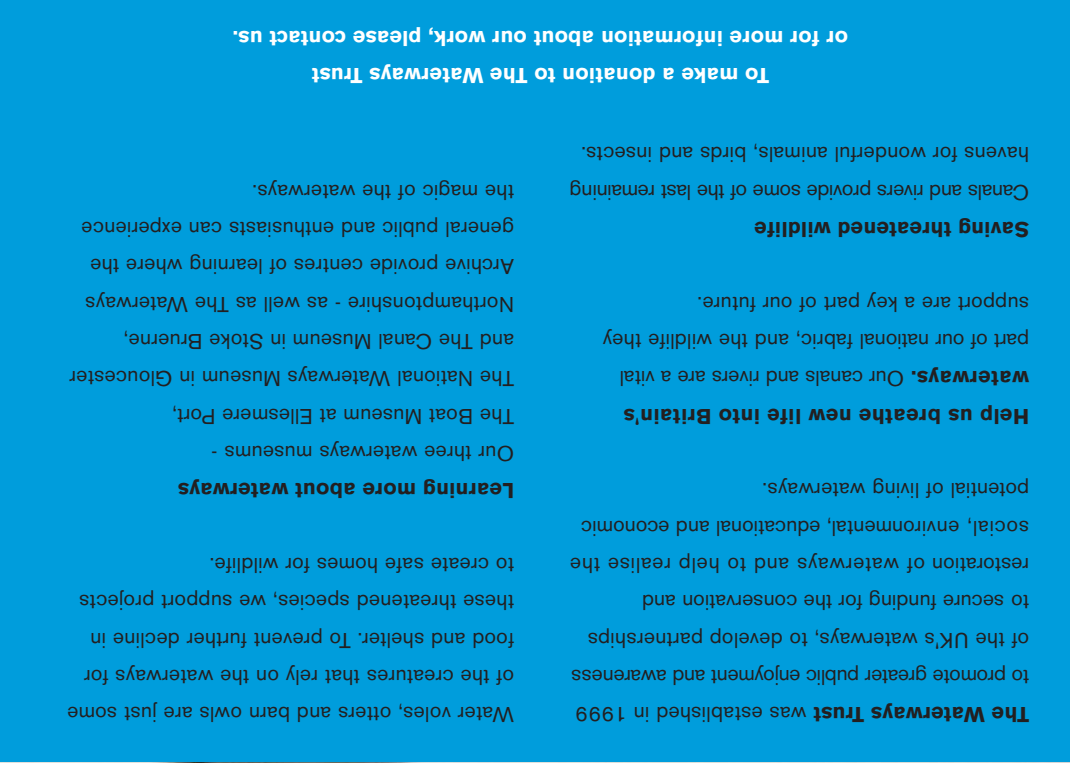
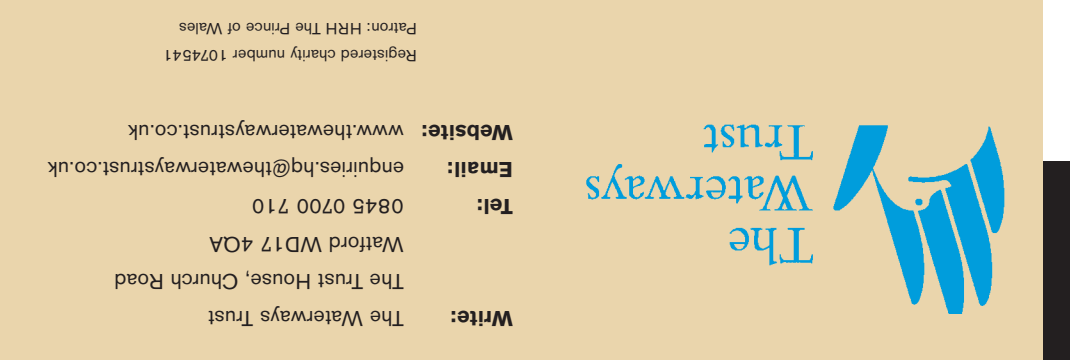
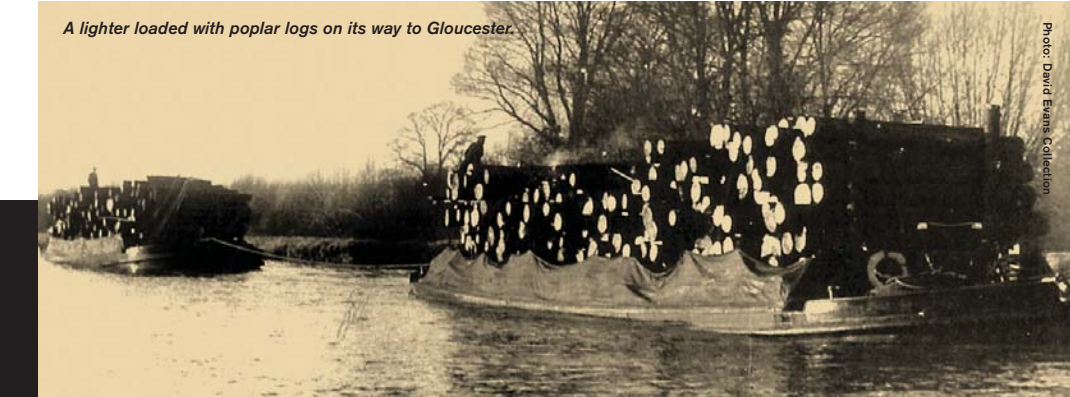
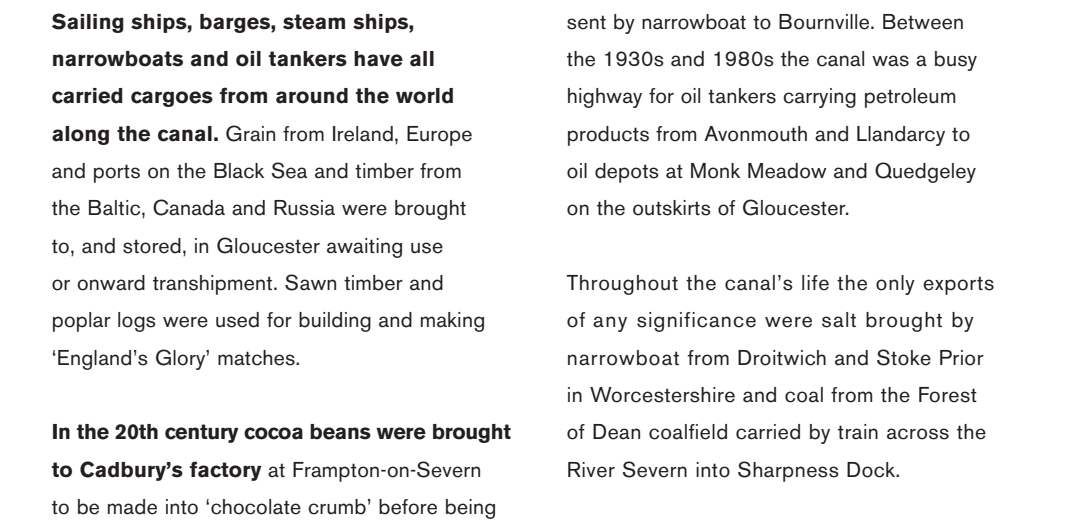
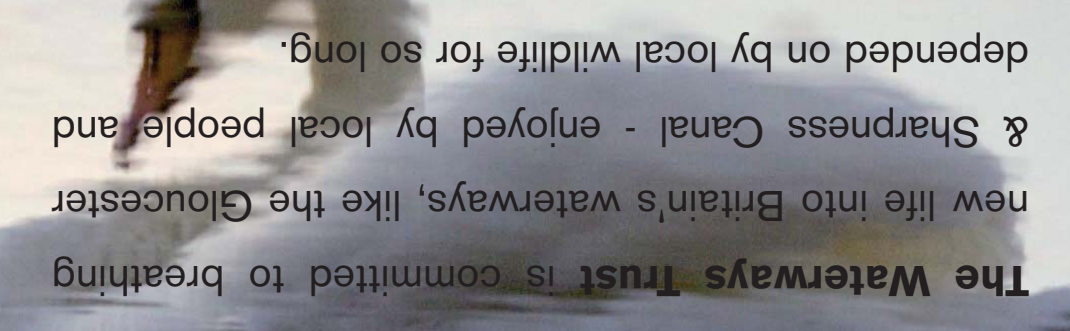
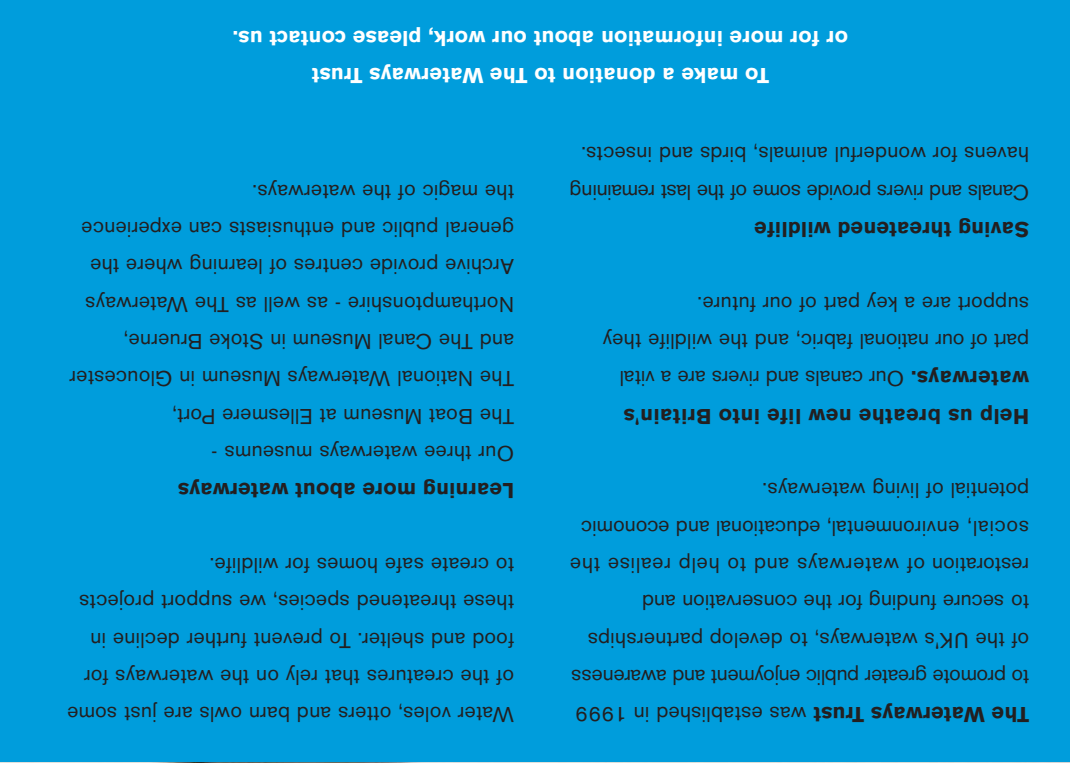
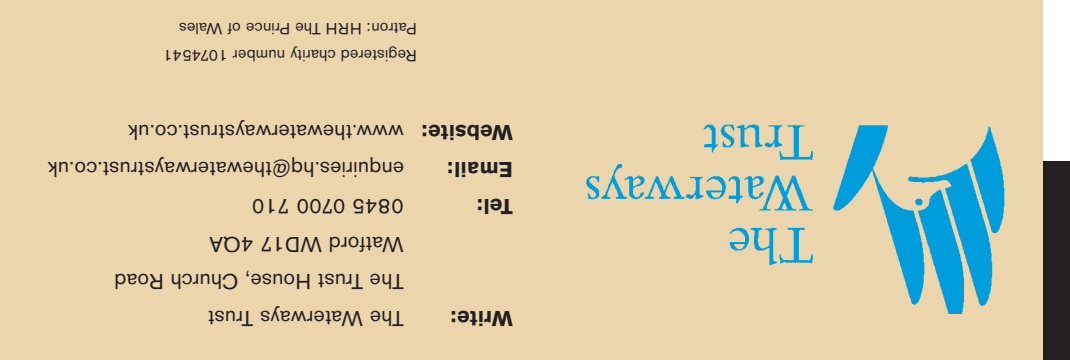
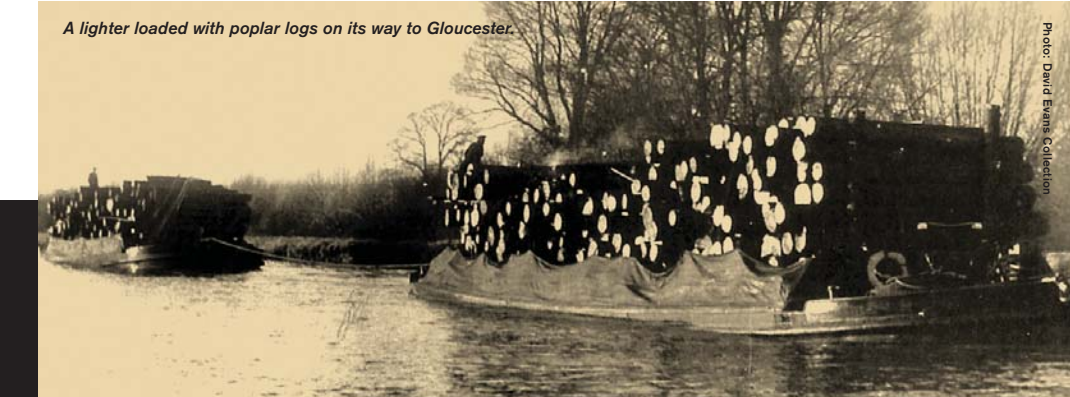
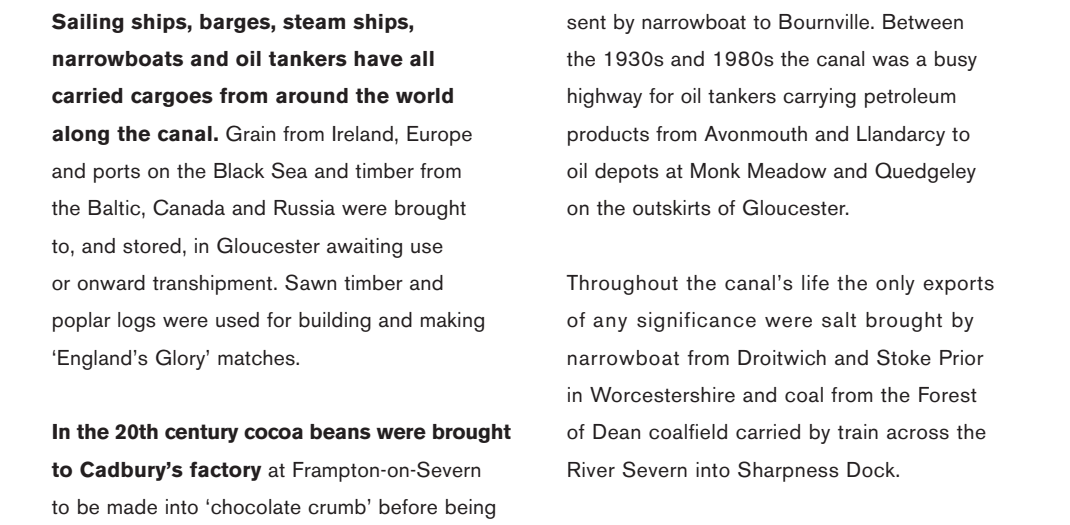
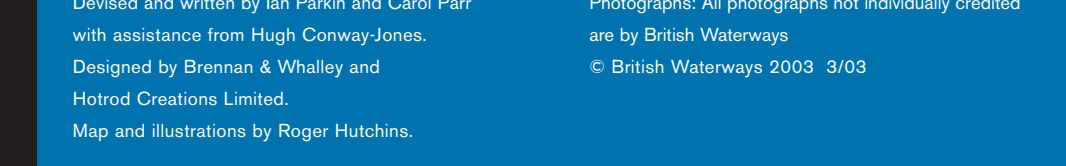
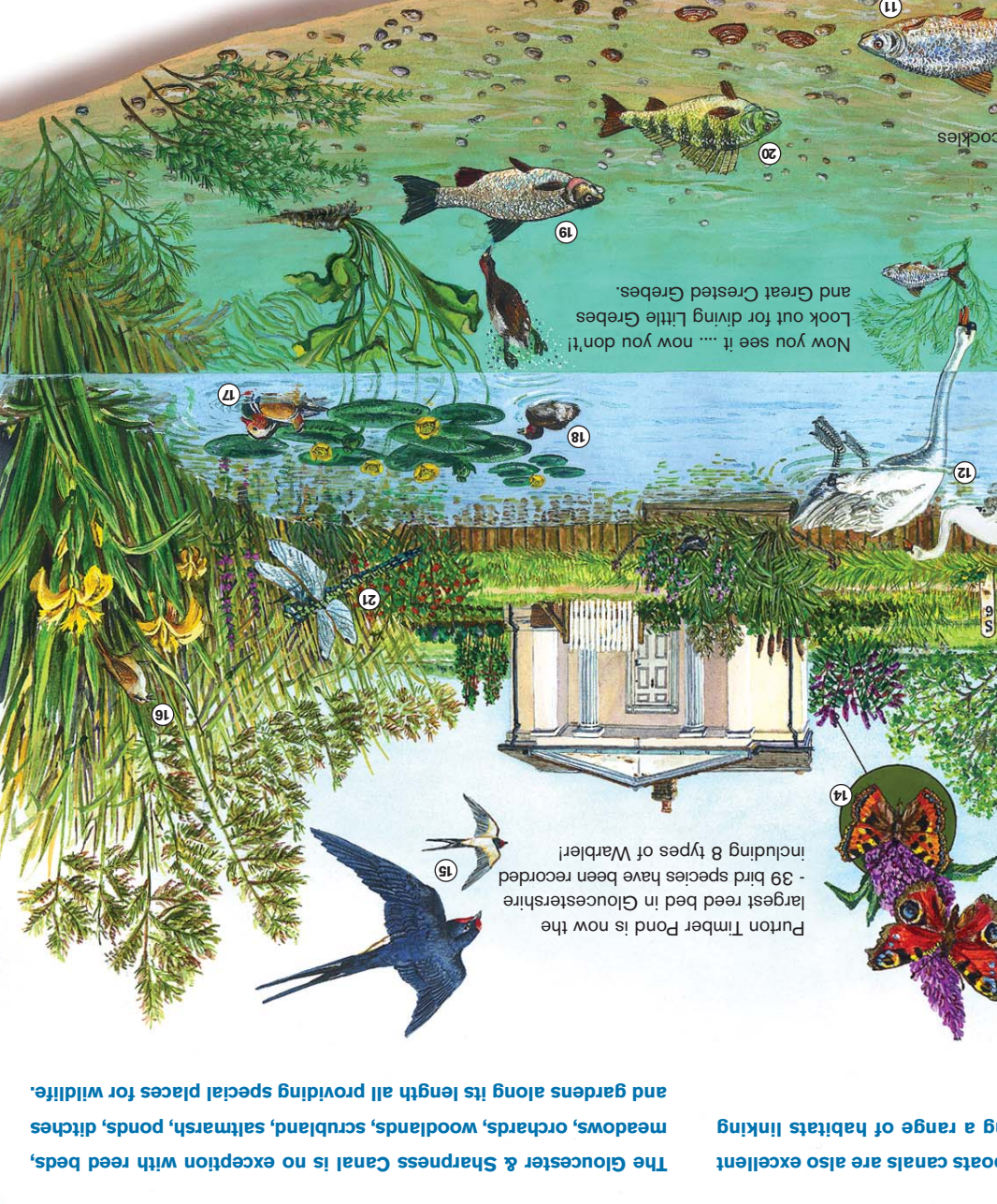


That was the claim to fame when this canal opened in 1827.
It was built to bypass a treacherous, winding stretch of the River Severn allowing Gloucester to become an inland port serving the industrial towns of the Midlands.

A canal of this scale had never been attempted before.
Dug by hand construction began in 1794. It was to be 21 metres (70 feet) wide, 5½ metres (18 feet) deep and nearly 29 km (18 miles) long. It was originally planned between Gloucester and Berkeley Pill and was to be called the Gloucester

& Berkeley Canal. By 1799 the money ran dry and the canal had only reached 8 km (5 miles) from Gloucester!

Work eventually continued with a government loan to provide employment for men returning from the Napoleonic War. The famous engineer Thomas Telford became consultant engineer and a shorter route to Sharpness was chosen. It took a further 10 years to complete the remaining 18 km (11 miles) due to continuing financial and engineering difficulties. A major milestone was the junction with the Stroudwater Canal at Saul in 1820 creating a link between the Midlands and London.



What makes this canal so special?

The Gloucester & Sharpness Canal was built as a highway for some of the biggest ships of its day. It has international connections with ships, cargoes and crews coming from all over the world. It is passed by thousands of people every day who do not even realise it is there as it cannot be seen from the nearby A38 or M5. Local people can remember seeing tall-ships moving along as if silently gliding through the fields.

The Old and The New at Sharpness Docks
Sharpness has two docks! The Old Dock, with its Old Dock House, is now a peaceful marina. Within 50 years of opening ships had already outgrown the canal entrance and a new entrance and dock were built to the south able to handle large ocean going ships up to 7000 tons register. Ships can only enter the lock at high tide and are guided in by experienced river pilots.



Sharpness New Dock, 1877



Sharpness New Dock, today

The 'Vindicatrix', moored in Sharpness Old Dock from the late 1930s until 1967, was the training ship for as many as 70,000 boys preparing them for a life at sea in the Merchant Navy.



Photo: Courtesy of the Merchant Navy Association

The Rise and Fall of the Severn Railway Bridge
This magnificent bridge was built in the 1870s to carry coal from the Forest of Dean to Sharpness Dock for export and for use as fuel for steam ships. A tragic accident occurred in thick fog in 1960 when 2 tankers collided with one of the piers. The bridge was later demolished but the remains of the piers and tankers can still be seen at low tide.

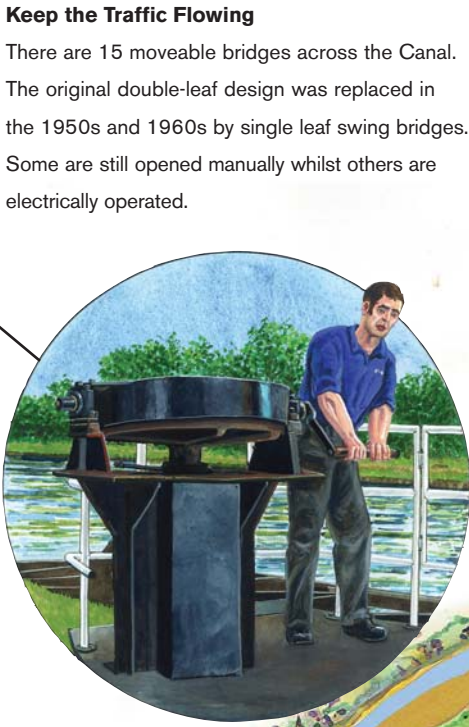


Photo: Courtesy of Margaret Davies

"My brother and I went off to look at the Severn and came face to face with a huge looming wooden bow, and then another, and another. There were lots of them, old wooden ships rearing out of the goosegrass. Inside the massive keelsons, futtocks, frames and knees of oak, the pitch pine planking split along the seams, old pitch peeling away and the smell of salt scoured timber, tar and Severn mud. I played on those old ships all day."
David Wheeler from Devon remembers discovering the boat graveyard as a boy in 1950's



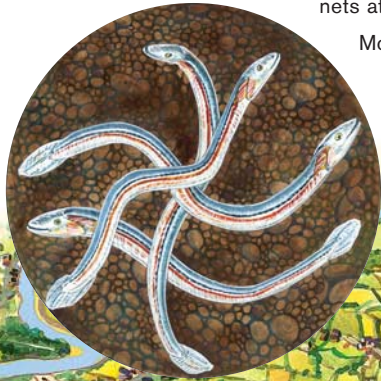
The Final Resting Place
The Monarch, Edith, Shamrock, Harriet, Voltaic, Huntley and Abbey were all laid to rest in the 'boat graveyard' near Purton. Old barges, schooners, ketches and concrete lighters were deliberately 'beached' to protect the canal embankment from erosion by the River Severn.



Keep the Traffic Flowing
There are 15 moveable bridges across the Canal. The original double-leaf design was replaced in the 1950s and 1960s by single leaf swing bridges. Some are still opened manually whilst others are electrically operated.



A Touch of Class
The smart neo-classical style Bridge Keeper's cottages were built in the 1840s when the canal operated at night to compete with the railways.



Fancy a pint?
How about a pint of baby eels?
'Elvering' has a long tradition on the River Severn. Elvers are fished from the river with nets at night during March and April. Most are now exported but

they were once a popular local delicacy, blanched in boiling water, fried in bacon fat and served with a poached egg. Local villages held 'pint of elvers' eating competitions.



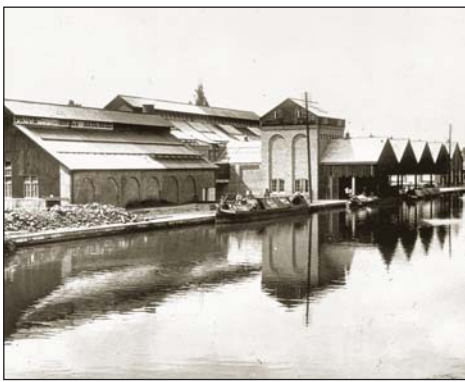
- KEY TO MAP**
- 1 Llanthony Bridge
 - 2 Hempsted Bridge
 - 3 Sims Bridge
 - 4 Rea Bridge
 - 5 Sellars Bridge
 - 6 Parkend Bridge
 - 7 Saul Junction Bridge
 - 8 Sandfield Bridge
 - 9 Fretherne Bridge
 - 10 Splatt Bridge
 - 11 Cambridge Arm Bridge
 - 12 Patch Bridge
 - 13 Purton Upper Bridge
 - 14 Purton Lower Bridge
 - 15 Sharpness High Level Bridge
 - 16 Sharpness Low Level Bridge

Inland Port
100 years ago Gloucester Docks was a hive of activity with sailing ships, steam ships, barges and narrowboats carrying timber and grain. The docks supported thriving local industries including corn mills, joinery workshops, saw mills, shipbuilding, rope works and sail making.



Why not visit The National Waterways Museum in the Docks to learn more about our waterways and perhaps take a trip on one of their historic boats. It also has a shop and café and runs events and courses - from tug boat driving to blacksmithing.

The Cadbury Connection
This canalside factory near Frampton on Severn once made 'chocolate crumb' from cocoa beans brought by ship into Sharpness Dock. The beans were processed, mixed with sugar and milk and baked. The crumb was taken by narrowboat to Bourville, in Birmingham, to be made into chocolate. How much was lost along the way is anyone's guess but many local people know what chocolate crumb tasted like!



Cadbury's factory in the early 1920s'

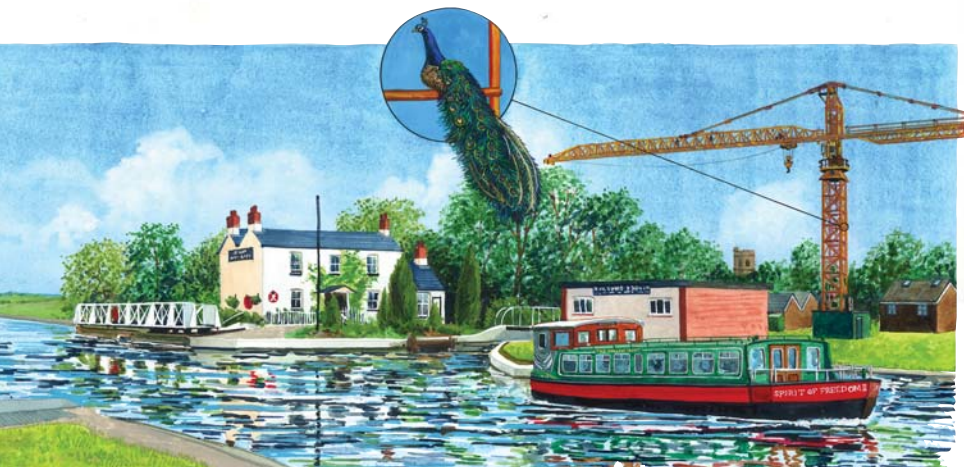


Slimbridge is the home of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust established by Sir Peter Scott in 1946.
The site has one of the largest collections of water birds and wildfowl in the world and is the temporary home to 45,000 over-wintering ducks, geese and swans each year.



Timber Ponds
Shallow ponds were dug beside the Canal at Purton and at Two Mile Bend near Gloucester to store square baulks of timber and large logs as floating rafts while they awaited processing.

"It was an amazing sight. A boat had collided with a pier supporting two 312 foot bridge spans which had collapsed into the river. The impact had ignited gas leaking from a pipe carried by the bridge. I heard stories of sailors swimming to shore with flames licking at their heels. My job was to report on the condition of the bridge and estimate the cost of repair but unfortunately, at that time, it was not economically viable to re-build and so the bridge had to be demolished."
Charles Grend, an Engineer at the Bridge Office of British Rail (Western Region), was called urgently to the scene



Saul Junction
In 1820 the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal cut through the existing Stroudwater Canal which together with the Thames & Severn Canal linked the River Severn at Framilode with the River Thames at Lechlade. There are ambitious plans to restore these canals to full navigation over the next 10 years.

Saul Junction is the venue for an Annual Boat Gathering and home to the Willow Trust whose specially equipped passenger boats called 'Spirit of Freedom' are regularly used by people with disabilities. There is also a busy boatyard and a real high flyer who you may be lucky enough to see roosting in the crane at dusk!